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THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF
FINAL FANTASY
From the NES hit to Dissidia: celebrating 22 years of RPG brilliance



IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

SEGA NOMAD
WHY SEGA'S HANDHELD LOST OUT TO NINTENDO'S GAME BOY

GEOFF CRAMMOND
THE MASTER OF THE RACING SIM GIVES AN EXCLUSIVE NEW INTERVIEW

COMBAT
THE ATARI 2600 CLASSIC THAT JUST KEEPS ON GIVING

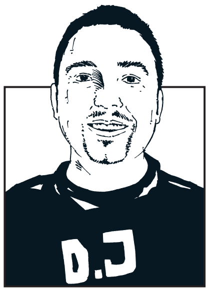
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RETRO GAMER*
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FINAL FANTASY GAME?



DARRAN JONES

It's *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* for me. The day before it turned up I put my back out. Laying on the floor for the next three weeks, unable to raise my head, I proceeded to clock up 225 hours on it. Yikes.

Expertise:
Juggling **Retro Gamer** and a family
Currently playing:
The Beatles: Rock Band
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT

Sorry, not a fan. I played one once, kept getting randomly set upon for trying to walk from one end of a screen to the other and never returned to the series since.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
The Beatles: Rock Band
Favourite game of all time:
The Beatles: Rock Band



JASON KELK

Oh… I've never really sat down and played through a *Final Fantasy* game. Does that make me a bad person?

Expertise:
What used to be called public-domain software
Currently playing:
Kernal's Chaos (C64)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

I was warned off *Final Fantasy* for life when I once considered playing the original before being viciously attacked by sentient Sega Master Systems demanding I play something fun instead. True story.

Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Flight Control's 'outback' map.
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



ASHLEY DAY

I've always disliked the regular *Final Fantasy* games. Too much grinding, so I'll go for *Final Fantasy Tactics* instead. The battles are much more rewarding to play and the game structure is more accessible.

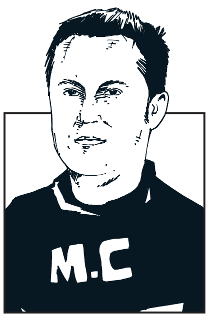
Expertise: The games of Team17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Muramasa: The Demon Blade
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



PAUL DRURY

I think I'll have to pick part *VII*. I didn't cry, though. Does someone die later on in the game or something?

Expertise:
Cheeky Mouse clones
Currently playing:
Pac-Man 2 (handheld)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

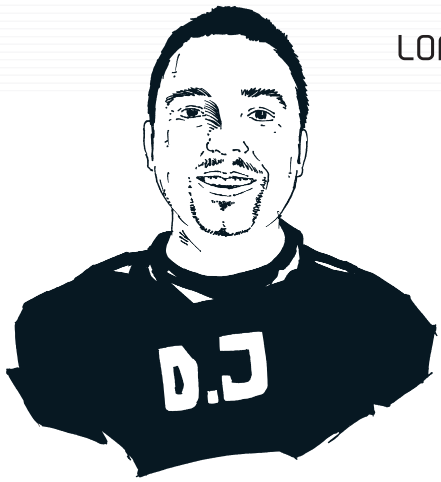


MARTYN CARROLL

Final Fantasy Legend III on the Game Boy. I've never really got on the core series, but this smart little handheld entry is the most accessible I've played, and the only one I managed to actually finish.

Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing:
Battlefield 1943
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING…



I'll never fail to be impressed by the dedication that goes into organising retro events. As we drove back from this year's Retro Reunited and I listened to the excited conversations, it made we realise the bond I share with my retro brothers.

The only time I ever see Mark (Markopoloman on the forum) is when we're driving up to these events, and yet he never moans about having to take me, even if his people carrier is already filled with items he's taking for everyone else to enjoy. It's a testament to the guy's generosity, and it's shared by all the other members of the community that I met at the Huddersfield event organised by Gordon Sinclair (SirClive).

Drinks were offered, thanks for the mag was given, and I was even asked to sign some, but it's the way people gave and respected each other's consoles that impressed me. As I walked around the floor I spied countless games and machines, some of which cost a hell of a lot of cash, and all of them were present at the end of the event.

I spoke to a wrestler, a wonderful guy who directs visual effects for big films like *Australia* and *The Golden Compass*, and even a zookeeper, and all of them were charming and loved retro gaming as much as I do. It was an amazing weekend and one I won't forget for some time.

Enjoy the magazine.



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» Load 69 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

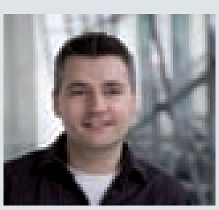


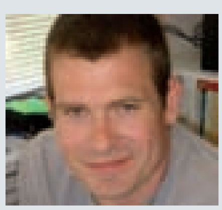
RETRO REVIVALS





In the hotseat this month…







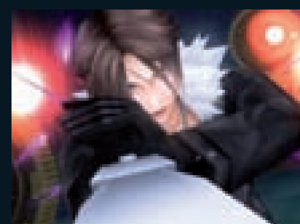
"The simplicity made it a real joy to play" Stuart Hunt



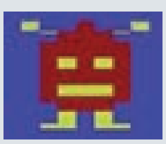
ESSENTIALS



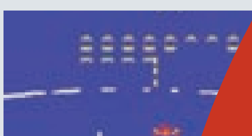
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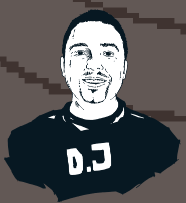
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retro radar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» It's retro overload this month as we spend a weekend at Retro Reunited, discover news of a new Sonic game that's in 2D of all things, and even get a sneak glimpse of a brand new documentary dedicated to Newsfield. Needless to say I'm worn out...

CONTENTS



» The main exhibition hall was immaculately organised and came complete with snazzy chandeliers.



GO DEEPER

» Jon Hare was due to attend but sadly had to pull out at the last minute.

» Rare machines included a CDi, Sega Nomad, PC-FX and a Nintendo Block Kuzushi.

» Over 250 tickets were sold, helping to raise money for homeless charity Shelter.

REUNITED AGAIN

RETRO GAMER REPORTS ON THE VERY FIRST RETRO REUNITED

Hot on the heels of the Byte Back event earlier this year, the Cedar Court Hotel near Huddersfield was the venue for last month's Retro Reunited classic games convention. Not having to stumble back to our accommodation from a remote venue appealed to us, and when we arrived late on the Friday night we were greeted by Gordon Sinclair and a couple of immaculate showrooms. The main hall held the bulk of the material on offer, headed up by a giant Rubik's Cube fronting a magnificent array of 8-bit machines on loan from the Centre for Computing History. Elsewhere dozens of vintage computers, consoles and oddities were clustered in themed areas, while a lonely Sinclair C5 lurked in a shadowy corner.

Our editor kicked off the day on Saturday with a welcome to attendees. *Head Over Heels* creator Jon Ritman was one of the first 'celebs' to arrive and promptly made a beeline for the arcade section for a crack on *Battlezone*. Other choice cabs on display included a tabletop *Asteroids*, a pristine *Missile Command*, and UK champion John Stoodley's *Pac-Man* cabinet. **Retro Gamer**'s John Szczepaniak seemed impressed with a bevy of obscure Japanese machines including a PC-FX, a Nintendo Block Kuzushi, and a bizarre hybrid system, the Action Max, which played lightgun-style games from VHS cassettes.

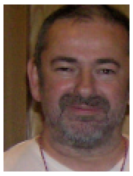
Early on, proceedings in the main hall were brought to a halt after a misplaced pint had a disagreement with an electrical socket, causing some confusion for the would-be mop-tops launching into *Day Tripper* on *The Beatles: Rock Band*. Although the power outage was temporary, many used it as an excuse to explore the second room, which housed the Acorn World exhibit organised by Dave Moore, and was populated by chaps like Jamie Woodhouse (*Qwak*), Matthew Atkinson (*Repton 3*) and Kenton Price (BBC Micro conversion of *Starquake*). Here we bumped into homebrew correspondent Jason Kelk, working frantically to digitise raffle winner Adman Mustapha into his C64 shooter *GR9 Strike Force*.

Ubisoft's Korina Abbot kicked off the guest talks with a round-up of her company's early history. "I usually attend larger events," she told us later, "but I think it's important that Ubisoft has a presence at some of the smaller events as well, and being a gamer myself, I really enjoyed it. We had the Xbox Live *Turtles In Time* remake and a preview code of *TMNT: Smash-Up* on the Wii. Both were very well received, especially *Turtles In Time*, as many remembered the original release."

Archer MacLean showed a video demo of his upcoming *Wheelspin* (formerly *Speedzone*), before answering audience questions on a variety of topics about his classic

Developer's opinions

» What the celebrities thought about Retro Reunited



Jon Ritman

"I really enjoyed playing an original arcade *Battlezone* again after all these years! We had a machine in our local chip shop back in the day, but I'd completely forgotten about those evil homing missiles. It's funny how much of this stuff brings back so many little memories, like the Bob Wakelin *Match Day* art. This is the first retro-themed event I've attended, but I'd certainly be happy coming to more in the future."



Charles Cecil

"I had a great time. I love meeting with people who enjoy my games, and the event has real promise. It was organised by extremely passionate gamers and it would be great to see the event grow in future years. When you consider how many turned out for an event on the outskirts of Huddersfield, it's amazing. Around 20 came to my talk, and we huddled around and had a lovely chat."



Archer MacLean

"I generally just enjoyed the show! Nicely laid out, not too crowded, good to meet up with the retro crowd. My degree was in cybernetics so I was fascinated to look at the old robotic stuff. But these days the same thing is available as a toy from the Far East with some innovative mechanical solutions. Given more time, I'd like to have a go at the various flavours of *Guitar Hero* – but only when no one's looking…"



» The Centre for Computing History's display included relics such as a Jupiter Ace, ZX80 and Mattel Aquarius.



» **Retro Gamer** editor Darran Jones and Archer MacLean having a good old chinwag in Acorn World.



titles. Amusing revelations included how *International Karate* used digitised wooden spoons for its bone-crunching sound effects, and the pay negotiations for his first title, US Gold's *Dropzone*. "Geoff Brown asked me 'How much do you want?', so I just whipped out this Ferrari sales brochure and said 'That one.'" Ironically, he had driven up to the event in a diesel…

The highlight of the talks was arguably the one given by Revolution Software's Charles Cecil. His presentation turned into an intimate, candid, and very funny set of anecdotes on the making of games like *Broken Sword* and *Lure Of The Temptress*. He also revealed his run-ins with Hollywood while working on the *Da Vinci Code* videogame. Another hilarious story about how the *Beneath A Steel Sky* voice actors 'prepared' for a certain recording session cannot possibly be repeated here!

One of the talking points of day two was the record-breaking performance of Simon Skelly on *Janey Thomson's Marathon*. This parody of the original game featured a full 26.4-mile marathon, button-bashing style, and was the result of a collaboration between E4 Games and **RG** reader Mat Corne. Simon managed to beat the previous record of 2 hours 58 minutes set by Phil Lancaster the previous day by 36 minutes, winning the tabletop machine as a reward, although Twin Galaxies has yet to be informed. "It made my weekend because when we cooked up the idea I don't think any of us really believed that anyone would finish the game," chuckled Mat, "so the fact that two people did it is fantastic, and made the six hours of work completely worth it!"

> "A magnificent array of 8-bit machines, vintage computers, consoles and other oddities"

The weekend drew to a close with a talk by Steve Furber, designer of the BBC Micro, and the ever-popular charity auction in which the star lot was Oli Frey's original *Barbarian 2* cover artwork for issue 40 of *Zzap!64*, which went for a cool £50. The event raised a total of over £1,000 for Shelter over the two days of the show. Gordon later reflected on the success of the convention: "It ran pretty smoothly, but only because I had some fantastic helpers. I particularly enjoyed playing on the arcade machines. Emulation is great, but nothing beats standing in front of a real cab and playing the games how they were intended." All in all, a grand couple of days out for everyone involved… *

THE RETRO DEBATE

» What did you like best about Retro Reunited?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

ID: Stuart_c
I voted games. This was the first time I had experienced Japanese gaming and I'm sold. My next consoles are going to be a Famicom and Super Famicom and hopefully somewhere down the line a PC-FX.

ID: merman
Meeting the celebrities. I would love to have spent more time talking to Jon Ritman.

ID: Mohicankid
I don't come to these things for the games; I come for the people! And THAT is why I can't wait for the next one!

ID: Rinoa
Yes, definitely with the majority here. Without a doubt the best part is meeting new and familiar faces.

ID: TwoHeadedBoy
Meeting the familiar faces as well as the new buddies, particularly Dam, Cauterize and Szczepaniak. Yeah, lots of fun. And the PC-FX.

ID: Blumf
First time I've attended a retro event, and it was great meeting you chaps off the forum. Top blokes (and ladies) all round. I definitely think BIG badges with large lettering with your forum names on would have helped me, or T-shirts with avatar and ID.

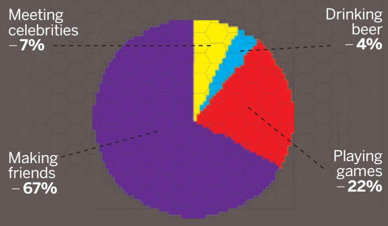
ID: woody.cool
For me, the highlight was meeting my existing friends – and making new ones – as well as playing games. It was a great couple of days, and I really enjoyed it.

ID: DPrinny
Making money and playing some rare stuff.

ID: boggyb68
Definitely making new and meeting old friends… followed extremely closely by beeeeeeeeeerrrr…

FORUM OPINION

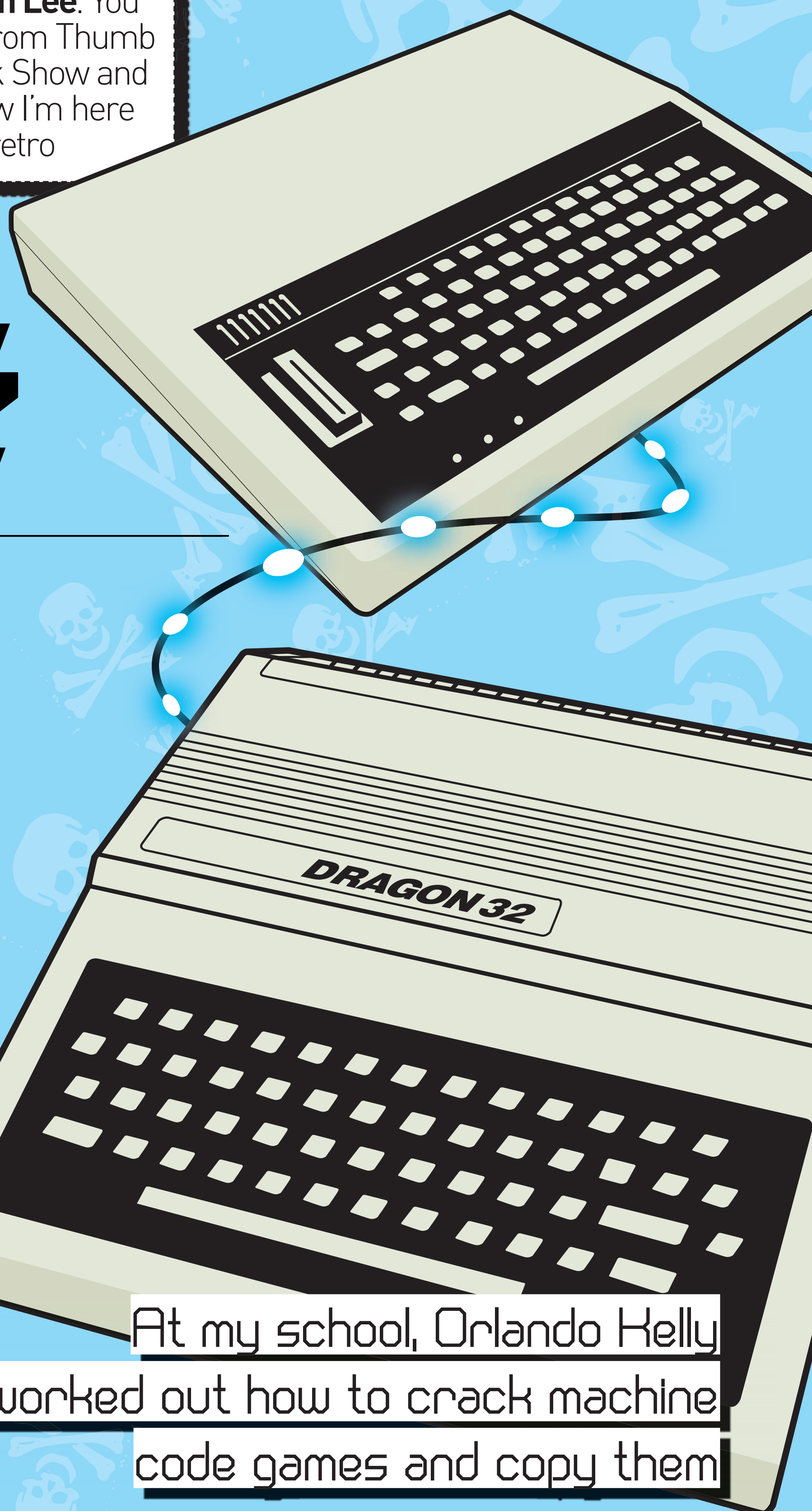
What did you like best about Retro Reunited?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting *The Sunday Night* show on Absolute Radio at 10pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Piracy Is Very, Very Naughty

So how did you copy games back in the olden days? Don't get me wrong, I'm not condoning this illegal infringement of copyright; it's very naughty and all forms of piracy lead to the collapse of civilisation, as we know it. Just look at how derided Knock-off Nigel was in those adverts that promoted the buying and selling of hooky DVDs. He had a terrible time being followed around his local by a trampy-looking folk singer.

In the Eighties, I single-handedly cost the UK gaming industry about £25.88 – a lot of money back then. My nan bought her first house for less than that. Before tape to tape I tried to copy games by having one cassette player going and putting another one up close and recording the output. Incidentally, this was the technique I used to record audio of Jackie Chan's *Drunken Master*. That's right, I listened to the *sounds* of a kung-fu film.

That reminds me: there was a games programme on ITV in the Eighties, and over the end credits they played the loading sound (there must be a technical term for that noise, my fans on the forum – any suggestions?) and you were supposed to record it and then load it up. Did anyone ever get that to work? I know I didn't, partly because it was a crap idea and partly because my mum hated the screeching noise and always shouted at me to turn it down, thereby making this pointless exercise even more pointless.

BBC Micro had its tricks. If a game was written in BASIC you could load it up and save it again. But were there any BASIC games you actually wanted to copy? Er, no. At my school, Orlando Kelly worked out how to crack machine code games and copy them. That was a very exciting time. I've just made Orlando sound cleverer than he was. To balance things up I'll tell you the following: we once thought – and this is the God's honest truth – that if we went on to our computers at the same time and put the house phones near them, the computers (a BBC and Dragon) would be able to link up and communicate. That's right, we tried to invent the internet in 1982.

Games companies must have been gutted when Alan Sugar brought out double tape decks. We gamers were in pirate heaven. Piracy was as cheap and easy as buying a few C90s and hitting play and record. Companies fought back by bringing out annoying and badly designed copy-protection devices. Remember the Lenslok system?

Of course, the games companies won eventually. They stopped releasing games on easy-to-pirate tapes and made us all buy cartridges again. To be honest, that's when I lost interest in games for a few years and began my studies in onanism.

> At my school, Orlando Kelly worked out how to crack machine code games and copy them

What's your favourite song from *The Beatles: Rock Band*? I've been enjoying playing *And Your Bird Can Sing* at the Budokan.





CLASSIC REVIEWER



BIO

Name:
Dean Mortlock
First Magazine:
Console XS
Role:
Staff Writer
Favourite Game:
It's too complicated – see below
Favourite System:
Xbox 360

Favourite game?
God, just one? Impossible. If you can imagine a mix of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, Modern Warfare, Resident Evil, Super Mario All-Stars* and *Sensible Soccer* then you might be getting close. It would be a horrific mess for 99.9 per cent of the gaming population, but I would be exceedingly happy.

Favourite system?
I've always had a soft spot for the Dreamcast, as it was well ahead of its time, but I'd probably have to say Xbox 360. I like the fact that it brought next-generation gaming to the masses at an affordable price. Xbox Live gives you some of the most accessible multiplayer gaming around, and the ability to rack up Achievements – although I never seem to have time to improve on my pitiful score.

Best press trip you've been on?
A week-long jolly in Hong Kong to look at the filming of some god-awful FMV game for the Mega CD. Ate indescribable things in batter that clearly stretch the definition of the word 'food', marvelled at some of the best scenery I've ever seen and had an amazing conversation with a Chinese man who was in the film *Emmanuel*. It doesn't get more memorable than that.

Best mag you've worked on?
Sega Power, hands down. Yes, there were periods when it was sloppier than a hospital sick bucket, but it was obscenely good fun. I mean, who else took a Saturn into an old people's home and got them to play *Virtua Cop*?

Mag you'd like to work on?
The one I keep locked away in my head…

Best person you've met in the videogame industry?
They're all lovely, obviously.

How have games mags changed?
Considerably, unfortunately, and not necessarily for the better.



» A new documentary celebrating the history of Newsfield should be available via digital distribution some time in the future.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, NEWSFIELD

RG INTERVIEWS THE COMPANY BEHIND THE NEWSFIELD DOCUMENTARY HEADING TO XBOX LIVE AND iTUNES

Newsfield, the publisher that formed *Crash* and *Zzap! 64*, is 25 years old this year. And to celebrate this anniversary, a documentary about the company will be appearing on iTunes very soon? Nightfall Film's Anthony Caulfield reveals all about his new digital project.

"A lot of us grew up with these magazines and they made us feel like part of a growing community," explains Caulfield. "With nostalgia being so powerful, it has kept these wonderful memories alive for us and *Crash*, *Zzapp! 64* and *Amtix* really were special magazines. I think today those of us who are in that age group also love the fact that we love old games, and part of that is fuelled by these magazines."

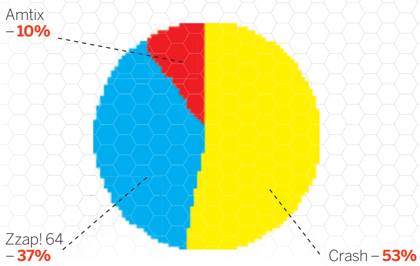
Interestingly, rather than release a DVD, Caulfield is looking at digital distribution and is enlisting services like Xbox Live and iTunes to get the documentary to as many people as possible. "We want to produce a whole series of films, but as this has never been done before, we felt the digital route presented the best chance of success. Shorter versions of the films will be available for free, with full-stream versions available on iTunes and hopefully Xbox Marketplace via Zune soon after. They should only be a pound or two and we hope that the retro community gets behind them so we can make more."

Needless to say, this is good news for fans of both Newsfield's magazines and retro gaming in general. More next month.

FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Best Newsfield Magazine



Both *Crash* and *Zzap! 64* were pretty much equally great, but *Crash* got there first
– liveinabin

I never owned a Speccy nor a Commodore 64 (I was an Amstrad child), but I still used to love reading my mates' *Crash* magazines
– gavcradd

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



Dreamcast lives on

It appears you can't keep a good console down, as yet another new game has been announced for Sega's Dreamcast. *Rush Rush Rally Racing* was a surprise announcement by Redspot Games and should be available as you read this. It's an exciting looking overhead racer in the style of *Super Cars* and supports four players. Needless to say, you can expect a review in the next issue.



Fancy a Bonk?

Hudson has announced a new Bonk – or PC Kid as he's known in Japan – game is due next year. *Bonk: Brink Of Extinction* will appear on Xbox Live Arcade, PlayStation Network and WiiWare and marks the first new *Bonk* game on a home console in over 15 years. We were disappointed with Hudson's WiiWare remake of *Adventure Island* so we'll be keeping a close eye on its latest announcement.



More Phantasies

After a brief count down, Sega has recently announced that a brand new *Phantasy Star* game is heading to Sony's PSP. *Phantasy Star Portable 2* not only appears to be based on the Dreamcast original and not *Universe*, but will also allow you to team up with fellow gamers all around the world (a massive oversight of the original). No news on a UK date, but let's hope it happens.

retrocolumns

PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Original fire

Modern games have sky-high budgets and development teams the size of small armies, but one man can still make a difference. This is why you can always argue that games are an art form, equal to music, movies and even more physical media such as sculpture. I strongly believe this to be true.

It used to be that one guy would lead a small team of like-minded pioneers, such as Eugene Jarvis at Williams on the coin-op side. The original Britsoft home computer gurus – Jeff Minter, Tony Crowther, and Jez San – did everything solo.

But even now you need only observe Peter Molyneux at Lionhead, Michael de Plater at Ubisoft, Cliff Bleszinski at Epic, and of course the long-running fascination with the Miyamoto effect. Creative Assembly has continued to flourish albeit along the road established by de Plater with the *Total War* series. However, Bullfrog clearly stumbled upon the departure of its co-founder, Molyneux. Probably, Nintendo would still be making trading cards if not for its universally revered head of R&D.

I got to thinking about this after Noel Gallagher quit Oasis. A commonly held view is that Oasis can continue without Noel's song writing. Maybe punters will pay to hear Liam run through the Greatest Hits every year. Fans will notice the difference, though, for better or worse. Can the same be said for development teams?

Yep. Team Ninja without Itagaki is going to struggle with *Dead Or Alive* and *Ninja Gaiden*. If Cliffy B abandons Epic, *Gears Of War* will crumble. I dare say *Mario* and *Zelda* have already lost some inspiration in the wake of Miyamoto's promotion to head of development. You may have read criticism of Miyamoto's role as overseer from second-party Nintendo development studios. But one of my favourite stories from this industry, which I have on excellent authority, is how some of the guys working on *GoldenEye* for N64 really couldn't say what Miyamoto had brought to the table… other than the idea to include a sniper rifle. As though the sniper rifle were something and nothing when we all know it brought so much to the game. I've heard similar tales about *Boom Blox* and Spielberg, where the dev guys at EA admit that a large proportion of the great ideas truly came from the man himself.

If you become a fan of games, you'll soon realise that it takes magicians to make the magic. And I especially like that we can identify the real thing from the pretenders, like proper rock bands versus manufactured pop groups. Everything has its place, but **Retro Gamer** readers, I suspect, will still be looking for faces to associate with their favourite games. Instead of being old fashioned – based on nostalgia for the likes of *Potty Pigeon* – I think this will be important for the future of the industry, to champion its leading lights.



If you become a fan of games, you'll soon realise that it takes magicians to make the magic

What's the worst magazine you've worked on? Everyone has moved on now, so I can safely say C+VG 1998-1999



SONIC DREAM

SONIC'S SET TO MAKE HIS TRIUMPHANT RETURN… AGAIN

Instead of the boy who cried wolf, Sega's handling of the *Sonic* franchise of late has been a clear case of the hog who cried I'm going to make a gallant return to gaming and then squander the chance with sub-characters who look like they should be on pre-school TV, and gimmicky bum sausages such as Werehogs and QTEs.

However, when Sega announced this month that it would be releasing a new *Sonic The Hedgehog* title some time next year, we were left excited by the prospect. Why? Well, it seems the new game, currently coming to unconfirmed consoles in 2010, promises to be more in keeping with traditional *Sonic The Hedgehog* gameplay. Furthermore, speaking to GameSpot, Sega associate brand manager Ken Balough confirmed that Project Needlemouse (the game's working title) was a response to "old-school *Sonic* fans" who "have long asked to see Sonic return to a more 2D style of gameplay."

Sega has also released a teaser trailer, but it reveals very little about the game: just the silhouette of the logo and some promises that we hope Sega plans to keep. However, if you look at the screen grabs we've taken from the trailer you'll notice that the image is actually very similar in shape to the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* logo. So we're confused, does this mean Sonic is receiving an HD update of his original Mega Drive game, or a completely new *Sonic* game, and this trailer is simply what happens when someone in the trailer-making department is given two minutes to create some magic? Whatever the outcome, we'll be sure to feed you more news as and when we get it. *



» Other than telling us the game's probably not a Dreamcast fishing game starring a guitar, the teaser trailer gives little away.





* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



Sega has already admitted it has made mistakes with the *Sonic The Hedgehog* brand in the past, so I doubt it will drop the ball here. Nevertheless, I will still be crossing all my fingers… just in case.

Stuart



I have just been burned far too many times in the past by all the lacklustre *Sonic* titles. And I'm still not convinced that this is going to be a return to form for the Blue Blur. Having said that, I really hope I'm proved wrong.

Ashley



Being a *Sonic The Hedgehog* fan is a bit like being in a dysfunctional marriage. Sega keeps promising that it's changed, but it's usually not true and you believe them anyway, only to be let down all over again.



WHAT IF?

Your favourite next-gen games remade, retro style

Subject No 6

Fallout 3

FALLOUT 3 IS UNDOUBTEDLY an epic, sprawling and engrossing adventure videogame that takes its cues from the likes of post-apocalyptic cinema and literature. Bearing that in mind, we reckon that, had the game been released on ZX Spectrum in, say, dunno, 1986, the game might have looked a little something like this. A text adventure title with snazzy accompanying visuals. We just hope Trev remember to code the dog in there somewhere.



» [Spectrum] We imagine that a game of *Fallout 3*'s size would probably take around a week to load.

Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



Sonic T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

We've been waiting and waiting for a good Sonic T-shirt to come along and catch our eye, and this month we found one. It's a blue shirt that makes you look like you've been biologically spliced with the blue blur, or a bit like that guy in Total Recall who has a baby for a belly.

Dynamite Deka Badge

- **RRP:** £3.99
- **Manufacturer:** Sega
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com

Rarely would we make a big song and dance about a badge, but this one here, which was given away free with copies of *Dynamite Deka* in Japan to promote the game, is so unsettling that we couldn't resist putting in the mag. Don't stare at it for too long, though, you may go insane.

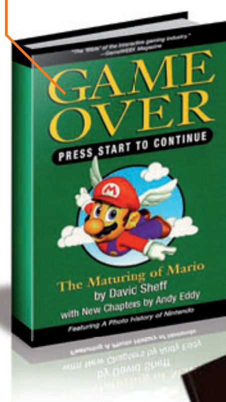




Game Over

- **RRP:** £22.14
- **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group Inc
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

A classic tome by authors David Sheff and Andy Eddy, charting the history of the world's biggest videogame developer: Nintendo. Once given away free with *Arcade* magazine, the book covers a wide range of topics: from Miyamoto to Mario and everything in between.



Sega Ages Electric Toothbrush

- **RRP:** £24.99
- **Manufacturer:** Sega
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com

It's amazing what you can find if you spend long enough looking. Take this item, for instance, what we have here is a bona fide Sega electronic toothbrush complete with some rolled-up Japanese instructions. There was a beach towel set too, but we thought that was taking our Sega love a little too far.

NiGHTS T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £59.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com

At £59.99 this retro game T-shirt will only appeal to die-hard Sega, *NiGHTS* and T-shirt collectors, but let's be honest, just look at it. You won't be able to dissuade us that it isn't a thing of wardrobe beauty.



Panzer Dragoon Music Box

- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com

Not many videogames can say they've spawned their very own music box, but then *Panzer Dragoon* isn't like most videogames. We're unsure what music this thing plays when wound up, we can only assume it's either *Puff The Magic Dragon* or the *Panzer Dragoon* soundtrack.



TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Handheld NES System

- **RRP:** $39.99 approx £25
- **Manufacturer:** ThinkGeek
- **Buy it from**: www.thinkgeek.com



This handheld may look like a plastic DAB radio welded to a NES cart, but the idea behind this ugly gizmo is sound: you get to play your old NES games anywhere. Now, what globe-trotting NES fan with pockets full of AA batteries could ask for more? Sadly, this console doesn't come with any pre-loaded NES games so requires a bit of hunting around car boots on a Sunday morning or scouring eBay for the bona fide cartridges, but that's half the fun. The specs are as follows: it has a 2.4-inch LCD TFT screen, built-in speakers and headphone out jack and even includes composite (NTSC) video/audio out cables for playing on a TV.

Super Nintendo Pencil Case

- **RRP:** £12.99
- **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com

We're guessing that if you read this magazine you no longer frequent schools – unless you're a teacher or a caretaker. However, if you're looking for something to keep a bunch of pens safe in your home then this pencil case, which is fashioned on a SNES pad, is a must own.





Mario Keychains

- **RRP:** £4.95
- **Manufacturer:** Bandai
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Are you one of those poor forgetful souls who is continually losing their keys? Yes? Well, solve the problem easily by attaching them to one of these squeezable Mario Bros keychains. Simples.



R/C Mario Kart Race Set

- **RRP:** £44.99
- **Manufacturer:** Games Station
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

This slot-car racing set could make a great gift for any *Mario Kart* fans. This set comes with two racers – Mario and Wario – and enough track parts to make some pretty wild-looking raceways.



Retro NES USB Controller

- **RRP:** $29.99 approx £19
- **Manufacturer:** Think Geek
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

There isn't a more recognisable videogame controller than the NES pad, so this one, which has been fitted with a USB connector, is an essential piece in any emulation toolbox. While some would argue its two buttons make it unusable when emulating games on later formats, you can't top it for iconic appeal.

Core Memory

- **RRP:** £23.00
- **Publisher:** Chronicle Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

A bit more arty than we're used to, *Core Memory* is the ultimate coffee-table accessory, including over 30 videogame machines from the Computer History Museum in California, all photographed in the style of a Turner Prize entry. We're intrigued, Mr Publicist, send us one.



Ice Invaders Ice Cube Tray

- **RRP:** $7.49 (approx £5)
- **Manufacturer:** Think Geek
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Be the talk of your soiree with this delectable ice cube tray that can turn water into wine. Actually that's not true; it turns water into 24 *Space Invader* aliens ice sculptures that can be dropped *into* wine. Anyway, we're sure you get the idea.



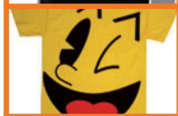
TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 Gauntlet
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Pac-Man
- **RRP:** £11.95
- **Manufacturer:** Namco
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Street Fighter II
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



05 Atari
- **RRP:** £27.50
- **Manufacturer:** Joystick Junkies
- **Buy it from:** www.joystickjunkies.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
- **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Porn & Pong
- **RRP:** £10.99
- **Publisher:** Feral House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 Masters Of Doom
- **RRP:** £8.99
- **Publisher:** Random House Trade
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

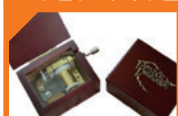


04 Racing The Beam
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Publisher:** MITPress
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Game Over
- **RRP:** £22.14
- **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group Inc
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Panzer Dragoon Music Box
- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com



02 7-Inch Alucard Figure
- **RRP:** £12.99
- **Manufacturer:** NECA
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 NES Belt Buckle
- **RRP:** $30 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** The NES Buckle
- **Buy it from:** www.nesbuckle.com



04 Sonic Costume
- **RRP:** £34.94
- **Manufacturer:** Heroes For Kids
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Space Invaders Clock
- **RRP:** $80
- **Manufacturer:** Taito
- **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY


» Harvey recently expressed an interest in reviving old Bullfrog franchises. We can but hope…

★ A MOMENT WITH...

Harvey Elliott

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hot seat. This month we've been chatting to EA Bright Light manager Harvey Elliott

Who is Harvey Elliott?

He's the vice president studio general manager of EA Bright Light. After working at Acclaim Cheltenham on titles such as *Shadow Man*, *Forsaken* and *Extreme G*, he moved to EA and looked after the *Burnout* franchise

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
As it's for you at **Retro Gamer**, I think I should go back a little, so I'd have to say *Burnout 3: Takedown*. It has the perfect mix of gameplay between high-speed racing and mind-blowing crashes.

What is your proudest memory?
I have had so many great moments, but one of my proudest was pitching a game idea to Steven Spielberg, and he loved it!

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
When I was at Acclaim Entertainment, my team were porting *Crazy Taxi* from arcade to the PS2. We were trying to get final sign-off, and I ended up flying back and forth to Tokyo four times in a month. We eventually got there, but possibly worse, I ran out of new films to watch on the plane. Even the Japanese ones.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
There are so many, but Miyamoto has to be up there with the best, not least because *Super Mario World* just blew me away. I still have my original cartridge, with all three saves 100% complete at 96 levels.



How would you like your games to be remembered?
As great fun, deep and enjoyable experiences that separate you from the world you're in to somewhere enchanting, magical and new.

Which games do you wish you'd made?
Pretty much any of the leading character action games at the moment. I love the genre, and games like *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *Call Of Duty* and *Mario Galaxy* have really hooked me in.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
So many. There is a genuine pleasure that comes from making a game with an amazing team of people. Getting to travel around the world and visit so many fascinating places; meeting and working with amazing people: David Heyman, Steven Spielberg, JK Rowling and so many other talented people who care passionately about their work and are truly inspirational to meet. And I've driven a hire car around Ferrari's test track… that I crashed.



What's your darkest memory?
Having to close down two development studios for a previous company, standing at the front of a room and telling them that we could no longer employ them in doing something that they loved.


» [360] EA Bright Light currently specialises in family-friendly games like the *Harry Potter* adaptations and the recent downloadable Hasbro licences.

And your best?
Hiring some of them back!

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
Travelling in Italy, both looking left – the car hit from the right. Flying to Australia and back in two and a half days, ending up with four 'gifts' from Thai airlines – what do you do with four brass elephant coat hooks, anyway? Japan back and forth multiple times over. "Constant lighting" that turned out to be a simple shadow over an art asset. Getting to a conference in Phoenix to find one of our colleagues locked out of his room, only to discover the next morning it wasn't his room – they just had two guests with the same name and without realising they'd ended up spending the night together. Sitting in a Japanese restaurant operating a fancy-looking pepper pot and every time being harangued by the waitress. Turned out it was a beeper for the waitress. So many…

"My proudest moment was pitching a game idea to Spielberg, and he loved it!"

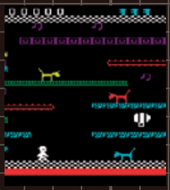


How has the industry changed?
It just changes. It moves quickly, then slowly, technologies rapidly evolve then they seem to stop – but there's never a dull moment. It's not an industry for stability and the status quo; it's always about finding something new, innovative, creative and fresh. And I can't think of anywhere else I'd rather be. ★

retrodiary

11 October–8 November

» A month of retro events both past and present



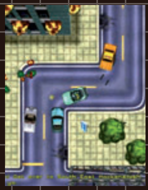
12 October 1984

■ Software Projects releases its first (and only) *Miner Willy* game on VIC-20, the surprisingly good *Perils Of Willy*.



13 October 1986

■ Elite Systems releases a *Scooby-Doo* game for Spectrum, but it isn't the cartoon mega-game it envisaged…



13 October 1997

■ DMA Design (now Rockstar North) releases the first game in the *Grand Theft Auto* series on PC.



14 October 1983

■ A&F Software releases Spectrum platforming masterpiece *Chuckie Egg*.



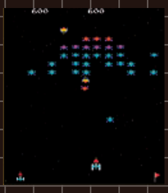
17 October 2005

■ *Mario Kart Arcade GP* is released. Namco helped with the development, which could explain the appearance of Pac-Man in a kart…



17 October 1977

■ Atari releases its 2600 console complete with faux wood effect front panel priced at $199. A videogame icon is born…



15 October 1979

■ Namco releases its arcade shoot-'em-up *Galaxian* on an unsuspecting Japanese public.



14 October 1999

■ Sega's Dreamcast is finally launched in the UK and Europe.



20 October 1985

■ Japan gets the first batch of Sega's new console, the Sega Mark III (known as the Master System in the US and UK).



21 October 1998

■ Nintendo's long-awaited Game Boy Color goes on sale for the first time in Japan.



22 October 2005

■ The Gizmondo handheld console is released in the US priced at $400. It bombed spectacularly on both sides of the Atlantic.



26 October 2000

■ Sony's PS2 is officially released in the US, just over seven months after its Japanese debut.



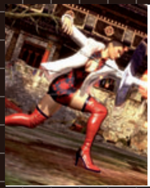
31 October 1983

■ Ultimate Play The Game releases *Lunar Jetman* on Spectrum. Trailer not included…



30 October 1987

■ The PC-Engine created by Hudson Soft and NEC hits the streets in Japan.



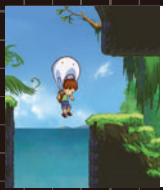
30 October 2009

■ Fans of Namco's *Tekken* will be pleased to learn that the sixth instalment is shaping up to be the best yet. It's available for PS3 and 360.



29 October 1988

■ Japan was the place to be (again) as that's where Sega's Mega Drive received its worldwide debut. Two years later it reached the UK.



6 November 2009

■ WayForward's reboot of David Crane's *A Boy And His Blob* is nearly here. Darran is hugging himself with joy.



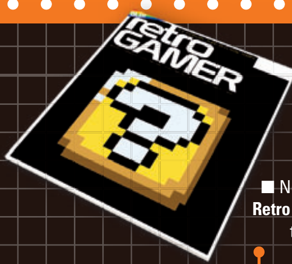
8 November 1982

■ The Vectrex vector graphics console makes its worldwide debut in the US, selling for around $200. A real thing of beauty.



8 November 2002

■ And there was yet more *Grand Theft Auto* when *Vice City* went on sale in the UK on PlayStation 2.



11 Nov 2009

■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

Retro Evolution

Looking at the classic franchises being revived for a new generation of gamers



1994
- » **NAME:** ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- » **SYSTEM:** JAGUAR
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** REBELLION
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

2009
- » **NAME:** ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- » **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3
- » **PRICE:** £49.99 TBC
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** REBELLION
- » **PLAYERS:** TBA

Alien Vs Predator

The climactic marriage of one of cinema's biggest science fiction franchises was always destined for greatness in this world. The nuptials took place in 1993 after a staggering ten titles based on either the *Alien* or *Predator* franchises. Debuting on SNES, and based on the *Alien Vs Predator* comic book series by popular American publisher Dark Horse Comics, the first game was a side-scrolling *Final Fight*-style beat-'em-up developed by IGS and published by Activision.

The player takes on the role of the hardest Predator in the galaxy. You are then tasked with the small assignment of single-handedly saving a colonised planet after it's deposed by an intergalactic band of face-hugging Sigourney Weaver haters, also known as the Aliens.

Praised for its good looks but criticised for its repetitive and challenging gameplay, the first *AVP* game was an uninspired start to the series. However, it wasn't long before the game series started living up to its promising heritage. Following the release of a similar side-scrolling game on Nintendo's Game Boy in the same year, albeit tweaked to feel a little more *Metroid*-like, Capcom released a colourful arcade game on its CPSII arcade board, which really opened people's eyes to how cool pitting two intergalactic sociopathic alien species against each other with a couple of gun-toting soldiers could be. Once again, *AVP Arcade* was your typical side-scrolling fighter, very similar in style and look to Capcom's beat-'em-up spin on *Bionic Commando*. Refining the gameplay of that initial SNES offering, it was a moderate success in the arcades but it was in the following year that the series found its most high-profile and eagerly anticipated title.

After a slew of delays, the first and most highly anticipated *AVP* videogame ever was released. Developed by Rebellion and released for Atari Jaguar, the first FPS *AVP* game really set the tone the series would adopt therein. It found players playing the role of either species, through either the perspective of a Colonial Marine, Alien or Predator. It was an innovative feature for its time and something that became a core concept of the series' gameplay.

In the role of Alien, players had to crawl through several stages of a Predator spaceship crammed with Predators and Marines to save the Queen. As the Predator, the roles were reversed, with poor Pred forced to skulk through his own ship to locate and kill the captured Queen. The final Marine section saw you playing the role of a Colonial Marine who is trying to escape a military base overrun with

* What we think



The Jaguar and PC versions were fantastic back in the day. Although this new update seems intent on using gore for the sake of it, it's nevertheless roused my interest. I'd still prefer a new 2D scrolling fighter though…

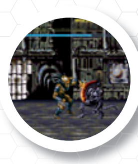
* What we think

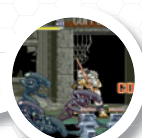


I'm a fan of both the first-person shooter games and the film franchises, and I do think that both PC titles were excellent. Here's hoping Rebellion lives up to its word and delivers the goods again.

Alien Versus Predator Timeline

Alien Vs Predator
YEAR RELEASED: 1993
SYSTEM: SNES





Alien Vs Predator
YEAR RELEASED: 1994
SYSTEM: ARCADE

Alien Vs Predator
YEAR RELEASED: 1994
SYSTEM: JAGUAR





Alien Vs Predator
YEAR RELEASED: 1999
SYSTEM: PC

Alien Vs Predator: Extinction
YEAR RELEASED: 2003
SYSTEM: XBOX





Alien Vs Predator: Requiem
YEAR RELEASED: 2007
SYSTEM: PSP

Alien Vs Predator
YEAR RELEASED: 2009
SYSTEM: XBOX 360



What's Changed?

The new additions that weren't in the original game



THEN: Featuring texture-mapped visuals, the appearance of *Alien Versus Predator* was simply jaw-dropping for its day.

NOW: The latest *AVP* game is running on a brand new engine called Asura, which has been developed by Rebellion itself.



THEN: The original was, essentially, three games in one, played from the viewpoint of either the Predator, Alien or Marine.

NOW: And the new game doesn't break with that tradition – it's another three-tiered first-person shooter bloodbath.



THEN: Each character had unique abilities. Predator had the cloaking device, Aliens could 'cocoon' Marines, Marines had guns.

NOW: Their strengths and abilities have been updated. And the 'honour system' returns. Can't wait to see what Predator has on his sleeve.

both of the hostile alien species. While no one could fault *Alien Vs Predator* for its ambition – it captured the spirit and atmosphere of the movies wonderfully – the game garnered mixed reviews from the press. Nevertheless, it remained a success, and sequels invariably followed.

The next two instalments, the BAFTA award-winning *Aliens Versus Predator PC* (once again developed by Rebellion) and its follow-up, *Aliens Versus Predator 2* (developed by Monolith), both appeared on PC. It continued down the route of a first-person shooter perspective but refined the gameplay, visuals and atmosphere. And many cite the small PC series as being two of the most terrifying and 'best' *AVP* titles ever to be released. Following the release of *Aliens Versus Predator 2* expansion pack *Primal Hunt*, the series turned its attentions back to games consoles with the release of *Alien Vs Predator: Extinction*, which ditched the time-honoured frenetic first-person shooter action for a real-time strategy instead. Keeping with the action split between the three factions, the game's over complicated interface, dodgy artificial intelligence, and the long-winded method by which you had to complete mission objectives meant that it wasn't particularly well received by fans and critics. But it was following this release that the franchise was handed back to Rebellion.

A videogame tie-in for the average sequel to the *AVP* movie franchise, *Alien Vs Predator: Requiem* was a third-person action game that put the player in the role of the Predator as he hacked and slashed his way through hordes of Aliens. The title received a middling reaction from the gaming press due to its lacklustre visuals, button-bashing gameplay and easy difficulty. More recently, however, the series has once again returned to its first-person shooter roots and is still firmly in the proven hands of Rebellion. Published by Sega, and appearing on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, *Alien Vs Predator* promises to be a return to form the franchise. *



* What we think

I've always thought the original Jaguar game was overrated, so I can't say I'm too excited about this sequel. I'm not much of an FPS fan either, so this will have to do something really special to change my mind.

THE PROBING QUESTIONS

Tim Jones, head of art and design at Rebellion, and *AVP* project lead



■ What tricks have you learned since the original Jaguar game?
Our original Jaguar version was made when FPS games were in their infancy. Rebellion was developing it even before the first *Doom* came out, though it was released a couple of months later and many assumed it was a *Doom* clone when in fact nothing could be further from the truth. We now have 15 more years of game development experience under our belt, not to mention 15 years of enthusiastic game playing. I think it's fair to say the number of tricks we've learned along the way are too many to list here.

■ It's gorier than others in the series. Does potential censorship concern you?
We're trying to make a game that's consistent with what you see in the *Aliens* and *Predator* movies and comic books. We wouldn't feel comfortable with toning down the harsh reality of the universes so we could get a specific age rating. We want to create an authentic experience and that was our goal with the originals too. A similar level of gory violence comes across as a little more shocking now because the graphical detail is so realistic.

■ Will any Jaguar elements remain?
The core concept of playing as the three species – Marine, Predator and Alien – remains. Beyond that, it's been built from the ground up.

■ What improvements does this new title offer over previous games?
We constantly go back to our 1999 PC version of *AVP* to remind ourselves what elements are key to the experience. That said, gaming has moved on a long way in the last ten years so many aspects have been rethought to bring them up to date. There's so much we can do now that wasn't possible before… we're able to develop the *AVP* game we always wanted to make. We can make everything so much more visceral, convincing and in-your-face.

■ Your original *AVP* pushed the Jaguar, can we expect the same from this one?
Oh yes, we're using our Rebellion game engine named Asura to power *AVP* and we're able to deliver the kind of dramatic, real-time dynamic lighting and shadows that are key to the experience and atmosphere. The game is looking very special right now.

■ Why do you think this licence remains so popular with gamers?
The movies are so iconic and have stood the test of time. [I'm] sure they will continue to do so for many more years… It comes down to the character design, the Alien and Predator are two awesome specimens, quite ingenious and innovative in their design, and then you add to that the Colonial Marine, a heavily armoured human out to annihilate these monsters, and you have a classic conflict on your hands.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

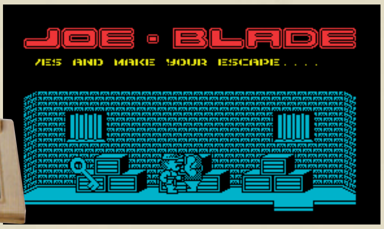
THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1987



AUGUST 1987 – Eureka moment for Acorn, Plus 3 price cut, Hewson Rack-It while Codemasters goes full price, Pirate Software pirates software, Joe Blade debuts and Death and Halo – not that one… – are announced. Richard Burton gazes into the face of Fear…



» Would Acorn's new Archimedes computer provide a Eureka moment or screw it over?



» [Spectrum] *Joe Blade*: Simplistic, budget fun, but a title that captured the interest of 8-bit gamers across many formats.



» [C64] *Uridium*: Rack-It, yet another branch of Mastertronic's budget empire, featured some back-catalogue greats.

As show reports dribbled in from the Acorn User Show held in late July, it became apparent there was only one thing really worth seeing at the event: the first public appearance of Acorn's Archimedes.

Although the powerful machine had no commercial games on show, a few demos did highlight the power of the Archimedes and its potential. It wasn't available to buy, but its official high-street release wasn't far away.

While Acorn's new beast was setting the world on fire, Amstrad's new disk-based Sinclair Plus 3 was barely smouldering. Its mooted price cut was due to the Atari 520STFM's own £100 price reduction making the Plus 3 look less attractive. Even though the machine was only officially released this month, the new pricing would take effect before Christmas. Given the choice between a £299 Atari ST and a £249 Spectrum Plus 3, you would not have to spend many minutes mulling that one over…

The trend of new budget labels continued with a collaboration between Mastertronic and Hewson Consultants. They would be releasing a mixture of old classics and new titles on the Rack-It label, with a price point of £2.99, catering mainly for the Spectrum, Amstrad and C64 brigade, with re-releases such as *Technician Ted* and *Uridium* waiting in the wings.



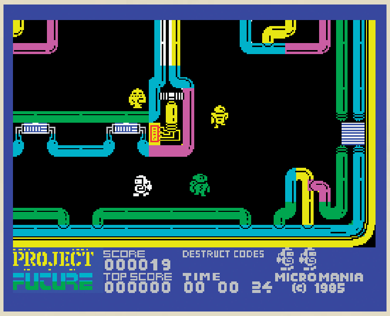
» The money ran out for Piranha… probably not helped by the extensive advertising campaign it ran for its new *2000 AD* games…

In contrast, Codemasters bucked the trend by announcing that it would be entering the full-price market. Codemasters Plus would price its new range at £4.99, with the first titles planned for Christmas. One of its first efforts was the charity game *The Race Against Time* for Sport Aid.

After the collapse of CSD, parent company to Creative Sparks and Mikro-Gen, two companies rose to bring you mediocre budget gaming. Sparklers was bought from the liquidators by Maynard International, with all rights to the Sparklers range.

A new company, Pirate Software, was formed by a former Creative Sparks employee to release budget games for the Spectrum and C64. The aptly named company brought in a variety of games, including *Them* and *Gangplank* from freelance programmer Harry Price, whose output was almost exclusively rip-offs of existing software. *Them* turned out to be Micromania's *Project Future* and *Gangplank* was 'based on' *Icicle Works* by State Soft.

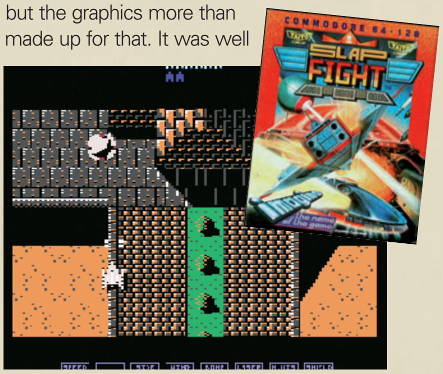
Players Software, yet another budgeteering software house, revealed in a press release that its latest and arguably best offering was ready for shipment. *Joe Blade* was a simplistic yet fun shoot-and-search game. As the aforementioned Blade, your mission was to locate six hostages, arm six bombs and find the evildoing Crax Bloodfinger – which sounds downright filthy and something you should see the doctor about – while keeping his henchman at bay with limited but refillable ammo supplies.



» [Spectrum] Pirate Software and Harry Price turned Micromania's *Project Future* into *Them*. Naughty, naughty.

Yes, it was a bit repetitive, and the large cartoon-like characters may have lulled you into thinking it was a game for younger players, but it wasn't, and it had a nice learning curve, and for a £1.99 budget game it was top-drawer stuff. Furthermore, it was available for almost every 8-bit system including the MSX, Atari and BBC. Needless to say, it sold very well and went on to spawn two sequels.

New out and packing away the 10p pieces in dank, dingy arcades across the land was *R-Type* by Irem. The classic side-scrolling shoot-'em-up was a testing shooter, but the graphics more than made up for that. It was well



» [C64] *Slap Fight*: No, not a chav fight filmed on mobile phones but an underrated shoot-'em-up with a novel power-up system.

1987

AUGUST NEWS



» I've never used a phone booth, I've never seen my toes, when I'm going to the movies, I take up seven rows…

On 17 August, Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy, died at the age of 93 in Spandau Prison. After being imprisoned for life after being found guilty of "crimes against peace" at the Nuremburg War Trials in 1946, he was sent to Spandau Prison where he remained until his death.

From 1966 until his death he was the only inmate held at the prison, which spawned many conspiracy theories into why one man should be left alone in a prison long after all the other inmates had been released.

His death appeared to be suicide caused by self-asphyxiation, although reports cast doubt on whether it was even Hess being kept under lock and key at all…

19 August brought a terrible killing spree to the town of Hungerford, when 27-year-old Michael Ryan went on a gun-toting massacre. He shot dead 16 people, including his mother. The police tracked him down to a school, where he eventually turned the gun on himself after an uneasy standoff.



» No, not the Berlin branch of Butlins but Spandau Prison, where Hess was detained.

31 August saw the release of Michael Jackson's *Bad*, which featured the hits *Man In The Mirror*, *Smooth Criminal* and, of course, *Bad*. The 18-minute music video to *Bad*, directed by Martin Scorsese and featuring Wesley Snipes, premiered on US TV on the same day.



» [C64] *The Race Against Time*: Codemasters' well meaning but ultimately uninspiring full-priced charity game.

received among arcade dwellers, who loved it, particularly the power-up feature of 'The Force', a pod-like attachment that gave your ship extra firepower and shields.

The comic *2000 AD* was again attracting licensing deals, with no less than three new games announced using popular characters from its pages. Martech was already busily publicising its upcoming game based on the Celtic king of warp spasms, *Sláine*, while Creative Reality added the finishing touches to it. The developer was also responsible for *Nemesis The Warlock*.

Piranha had cranked its marketing machine up to full bore with the news that it was publishing *Judge Death*. It would see you play the curvy psychic Judge Cassandra Anderson, saving Mega-City One from Dredd's most fearsome foe, Judge Death. Magazines were awash with adverts and free comics in the ensuing advertising drive.

Unfortunately, a more terrifying adversary put paid to the game when the liquidators stepped in as Piranha went bust. Its other game, *Halo Jones*, also bit the dust. Shame.

In the magazines of the day, the *Computer & Video Games* crew ruminated over the new releases, with *The Living Daylights* (Domark, Amstrad), *Slap Fight* (Imagine, C64), *Exolon* (Hewson, Spectrum), *Plasmatron* (CRL, C64), *Mag Max* (Imagine, C64) and *Hades Nebula* (Nexus, C64) all attaining the Hit award. Game Of The Month was *Micronaut One* (Nexus, Spectrum).

For the Spectrum, *Crash* only Smashed *Exolon* (Hewson), *Tai Pan 128* (Ocean), *The Big Sleaze* (Piranha) and *Micronaut One* (Nexus), and it was a similar story at Commodore counterpart *Zzap!64*, where *Lurking Horror* (Infocom/Activision), *Defender Of The Crown* (Mirrorsoft) and *The Last Ninja* (System 3) were Sizzled. A Gold Medallist appeared from the mediocrity: the marvellous *Head Over Heels* (Ocean).

The CPC-loving *Amstrad Action* was more generous, with Raves presented to *Barbarian* (Palace Software), *Stormbringer* (Mastertronic), *Ball Crazy* (Mastertronic), *Thing Bounces Back* (Gremlin Graphics) and *Triaxos* (Ariolasoft). The top dog and Master Game winner was *Mag Max* (Imagine).



» [Amstrad] *Ball Crazy*: A simple colour-changing tile game, a bit like *Q*Bert* mixed with *Tetris*.

THIS MONTH IN…

CRASH



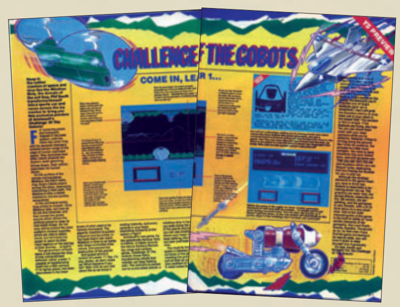
Crash's Run It Again feature returned to compare *Gauntlet*-style games – including *Gauntlet* itself – to see which could topple the official arcade conversion. While *Storm*, *Dandy* and *Avenger* all fell by the wayside, one game did pip Atari's classic in the final summary. Please be upstanding for *Ranarama* by Hewson.



YOUR SINCLAIR



After much procrastination and general tardiness, Ariolasoft had finally finished its *Challenge Of The Gobots* project on the Spectrum and C64. *Your Sinclair* ran a prominent feature on the game before its Spectrum launch later in the month. Unfortunately, the toy-based tie-in turned out to be more gonads than *Gobots*…



COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



There was a preview of yet another tie-in game with Gremlin Graphics' interpretation of *MASK* – the cartoon of the comic of the toys, etc… The franchise struggled to find its feet but sold well enough to warrant two further sequels, with the third game proving to be remarkably good.



CHARTS

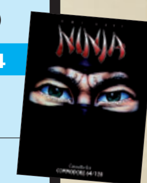
AUGUST 1987

SPECTRUM



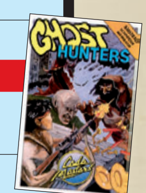
1. BMX Simulator (Codemasters)
2. Enduro Racer (Activision)
3. Feud (Mastertronic)
4. Football Manager (Addictive)
5. Auf Wiedersehen Monty (Gremlin Graphics)

COMMODORE 64



1. The Last Ninja (System 3)
2. Barbarian (Palace Software)
3. Milk Race (Mastertronic)
4. Wizball (Ocean)
5. I Ball (Firebird)

AMSTRAD



1. Ghost Hunters (Codemasters)
2. BMX Simulator (Codemasters)
3. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
4. Barbarian (Palace Software)
5. Six Pak (Hit Pak)

MUSIC

1. La Bamba (Los Lobos)
2. I Just Can't Stop Loving You (Michael Jackson)
3. Call Me (Spagna)
4. True Faith (New Order)
5. Who's That Girl (Madonna)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1992



APRIL 1992 – Ace and Crash depart, Sam has a Miner revelation, SNES on sale, NES reduced, Mario Is Missing and Arsenal fail to come out of the players' tunnel. Richard Burton nutmegs Adams before beating Seaman with a 40-yard backheel…



» *Crash*, a magazine many gamers had grown up with, finally succumbed to the inevitable march of time and gaming.



» [SNES] *Spindizzy Worlds*: *Spindizzy* makes it onto the SNES and keeps all the best qualities from its previous iterations.



» [Neo Geo] *Soccer Brawl*: Not a video of the last Leeds vs Millwall match but a futuristic football game from SNK.

Things weren't very ace for *Ace*, the multiformat games magazine. Publisher EMAP decided to end the 55-issue run of the popular magazine, preferring to split the different formats into system-specific periodicals.

There was further magazine-based woe when the longtime favourite of the Spectrum community, *Crash*, was stopped two short of its centennial issue. Europress Impact, part of Europress, which had bought Newsfield earlier in 1991, decided that the 8-bit era had had its day and sold the *Crash* name and logo to rival *Sinclair User*, owned by EMAP.

Apart from using the famous *Crash* logo on the front cover as a lure to the old faithful *Crash* readers, there was virtually nothing of note inside the magazine linking it to the former Newsfield favourite.

Still, a year later *Sinclair User* also shut up shop, with the prophetic words of the editor, Alan Dykes: "The Spectrum is now passing out of its commercial phase and into its special interest phase. If you are dedicated, it will survive." Fine words, sir. Fine words…

The Sam Coupé was still surviving, and some rather interesting conversions of existing games were finding their way onto the marvellous little machine. It may be 1992, but you still couldn't get away from *Manic Miner*. Revelation Software had converted the aged, dust-covered classic and had managed to create something quite superb.

With three sets of 20 caverns to conquer, it was already three times as big as the original, plus the Sam Coupé's superior power gave colourful, well-defined graphics and some excellent music too, guaranteeing that your crisp £10 note was well spent.

At last, Nintendo put the British console gamers out of their misery by officially releasing its eagerly awaited SNES on 11 April. Priced at £149, the console immediately took off and sold out across Britain. The thus-far unchallenged Sega Mega Drive now had a fight on its hands…

With the SNES selling so well, Nintendo's marketing men made the decision to mark down the price of its NES console to just £49.99. The basic setup of console, two controllers and power supply also proved to be a very successful move and ensured the longevity of the NES for many more months.

With Nintendo the current flavour of the month, it took advantage by releasing a press release stating that its long-proposed but current no-show, the SNES CD-ROM unit, was still under development. The truth was rather more disappointing, with this CD-ROM attachment never making it past the planning stage, although the negotiations with Sony to supply the CD technology indirectly led to Sony developing its own games console, the PlayStation.

Nintendo must have suffered a rare munificent moment with good news blessing everything it touched, as it allowed another software company to use the beloved *Mario* franchise – although it had to pay for the privilege, of course.

Mindscape was granted a licence to create educational games with Software Toolworks – later taken over by Mindscape in 1994 – doing all the development for the games featuring the hairy-lipped legend.

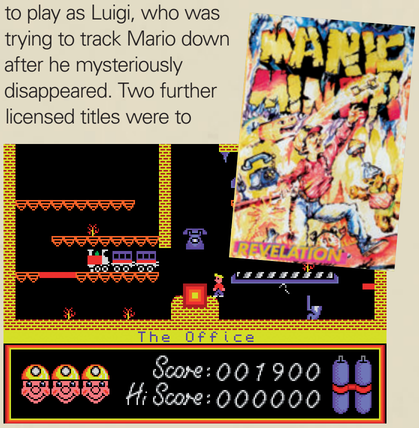
Mindscape's first *Mario*-related product was *Mario Is Missing!*, in which you got to play as Luigi, who was trying to track Mario down after he mysteriously disappeared. Two further licensed titles were to



» *Arsenal FC: The Computer Game* turned out to be *Arsenal FC: Missing In Action* when Thalamus went belly up.



» [SNES] *Mario Is Missing!*: Nintendo rather surprisingly allowed a third-party to develop new *Mario* games for the SNES.



» [Sam Coupé] *Manic Miner*: Bigger, brighter, more levels and better music; the nine-year veteran was still going strong.

1992

APRIL NEWS

On 9 April the grey man of politics, John Major, won the general election for the Conservatives for a fourth consecutive time. The result was a shock, as Labour had been edging the polls.

On 13 April, Labour's leader, Neil Kinnock, resigned after nine years in charge. He'd been the perfect foil to Margaret Thatcher but was always destined to be the nearly man. He was succeeded by John Smith – the shadow chancellor and not the beverage…



» For all his efforts in politics, his arse-moistening beach fall while dodging the tide sticks in the memory…

29 April saw the police officers charged with beating Rodney King in March 1991 found not guilty. The incident had been videotaped and showed King being beaten with batons and shot with a Tazer. The verdict caused outrage and resulted in several days of rioting in Los Angeles.

Something else that stank was the UK premiere on 17 April of *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot*, with Sylvester Stallone and Estelle Getty. Even Stallone called it the worst film he had ever been involved in.

Lastly, 19 April saw the death of comedian Frankie Howerd at the age of 75. Titter ye not…



» Yes, no, listen, ahhh, noooo, stop it, no, ahhh, ooer missus!





» [SNES] *Parodius*: Utter weirdness collides with playability to superb effect in Konami's shooter.



» [NES] *Road Fighter*: Put a poo on a stick and wave it in front of your face. *Road Fighters* had the same effect…

follow – *Mario's Time Machine* and *Mario's Early Years: Fun With Letters* – with all three titles gracing the SNES.

Coming soon to another SNES near you was Konami's fantastic scrolling shooter *Parodius*. Having been a tremendously playable game on the PC-Engine, a conversion was under way, which would introduce the opportunity to play an octopus flying through space, attempting to destroy the part-cat/part-boat enemy and negotiating a giant dancing showgirl's legs. We're fairly sure that's a unique set of circumstances in any walk of life, let alone videogaming…

And there was further good news for SNES gamers in that the classic 3D puzzler, the *Marble Madness* lookalike *Spindizzy*, was to be converted to the new machine. *Spindizzy Worlds* would see your spinning top means of transport attempting to map these worlds while solving puzzles and avoiding death from basically everything.

It had been released on the Amiga and Atari ST about 18 months earlier and proved to be a popular and well-received game. When it eventually arrived, the SNES version proved to be just as good, if not better, than its predecessors, ensuring Paul Shirley's *Spindizzy* legacy was as solid as ever.

Thalamus, the software house behind *Creatures* and *Sanxion*, told stories of good stuff coming soon to the Amiga, PC and Atari ST. Some of the delights to look forward to included a football simulation called *Arsenal FC: The Computer Game*, combining the management and arcade genres; *Beast Master*, and a conversion of the C64 game *Nobby The Aardvark*.

Unfortunately, Thalamus managed to get itself into financial difficulties and was put into liquidation, and those games remained unfinished or lost. Still, at least we were spared the digitised face of Paul Merson…

Mean Machines decided to bestow the Mega Game moniker upon *Battletoads* (Rare/Tradewest, NES) and *Exhaust Heat* (Seta, Super Famicom). A special mention goes to *Road Fighter* (Palcom, NES) which attained a hugely generous 9% score.

Computer & Video Games had a more varied selection of gaming wonderment on its top table of high-scoring games. Again, *Battletoads* (Rare/Tradewest, NES) attained Hit status, along with *Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu* (Hudson Soft, NES), *Soccer Brawl* (SNK, Neo Geo), *Star Trek* (Interplay/Electronic Arts, PC) and *The Manager* (Software 2000/US Gold, Amiga).

THIS MONTH IN…

THE ONE



The mini interviewees this month were Adrian Cale of System 3 and Mike Singleton, programmer extraordinaire. Mike told of his early programming days when he designed his first machine code game and assembled all the code by hand, seemingly because he didn't know what an assembler was!



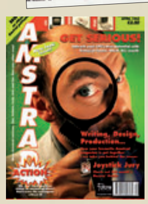
MEAN MACHINES



The outstanding release for the Super Famicom – yes, it was available only on import – was Konami's *Contra Spirits* (or *Contra III: The Alien Wars*). The game was evaluated and bagged an outstanding 95% from the reviewers, yet no *C&VG* Hit award.



AMSTRAD ACTION



AA ran a feature on how an issue of the magazine was put together, along with sound bites from most of the staff. It's incredible to think that out-of-work editor Chris Anderson started Future Publishing in June 1985 with just £1,000. The boy, as they say, done good…



CHARTS

APRIL 1992



AMIGA

1. Formula One Grand Prix (MicroProse)
2. Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker (Virgin)
3. Populous 2 (Bullfrog/Electronic Arts)
4. Abandoned Places (Electronic Zoo)
5. PGA Tour Plus (Electronic Arts)



ATARI ST

1. Heimdall (Core Design)
2. Wolf Child (Core Design)
3. Cruise For A Corpse (Delphine/US Gold)
4. Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker (Virgin)
5. Silent Service 2 (MicroProse)



PC

1. Eye Of The Beholder (SSI/US Gold)
2. Civilization (MicroProse)
3. Oh No! More Lemmings (Psygnosis)
4. Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (LucasArts)
5. F-117A Nighthawk (MicroProse)

MUSIC

1. Deeply Dippy (Right Said Fred)
2. Stay (Shakespears Sister)
3. Save For The Best For Last (Vanessa Williams)
4. On A Ragga Tip (SL2)
5. To Be With You (Mr Big)



17

Retro Gamer.net Reader's Revival

GORF

WHY THIS CLASSY CONVERSION NEEDS MORE LOVE



- » **PUBLISHER:** COMMODORE
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** VIC-20
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+



HISTORY

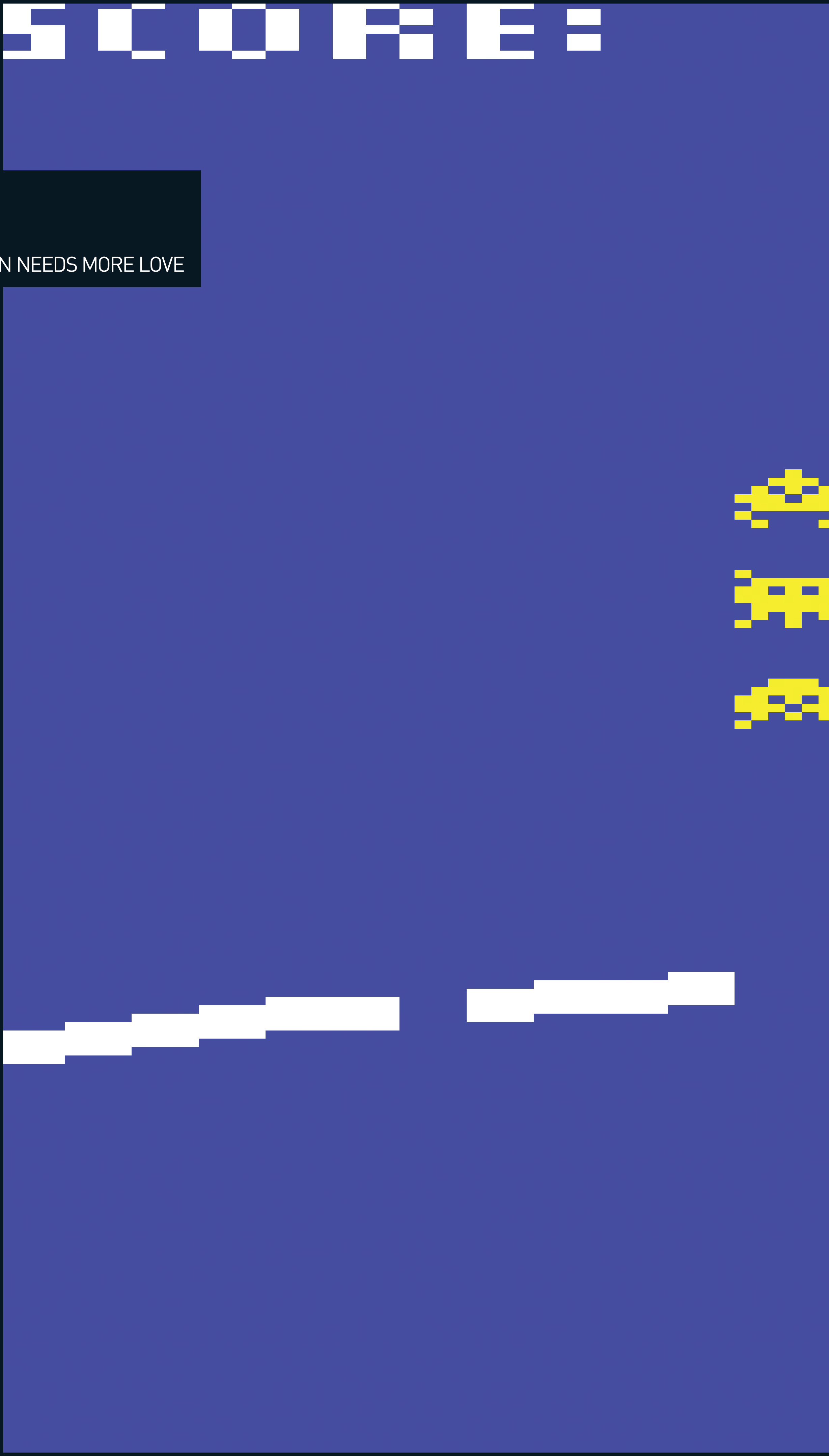
A long time ago, in a bedroom far, far away – well, Scotland, to be precise – a boy in his early-teens opened a big brightly decorated box and pulled out his newest acquisition.

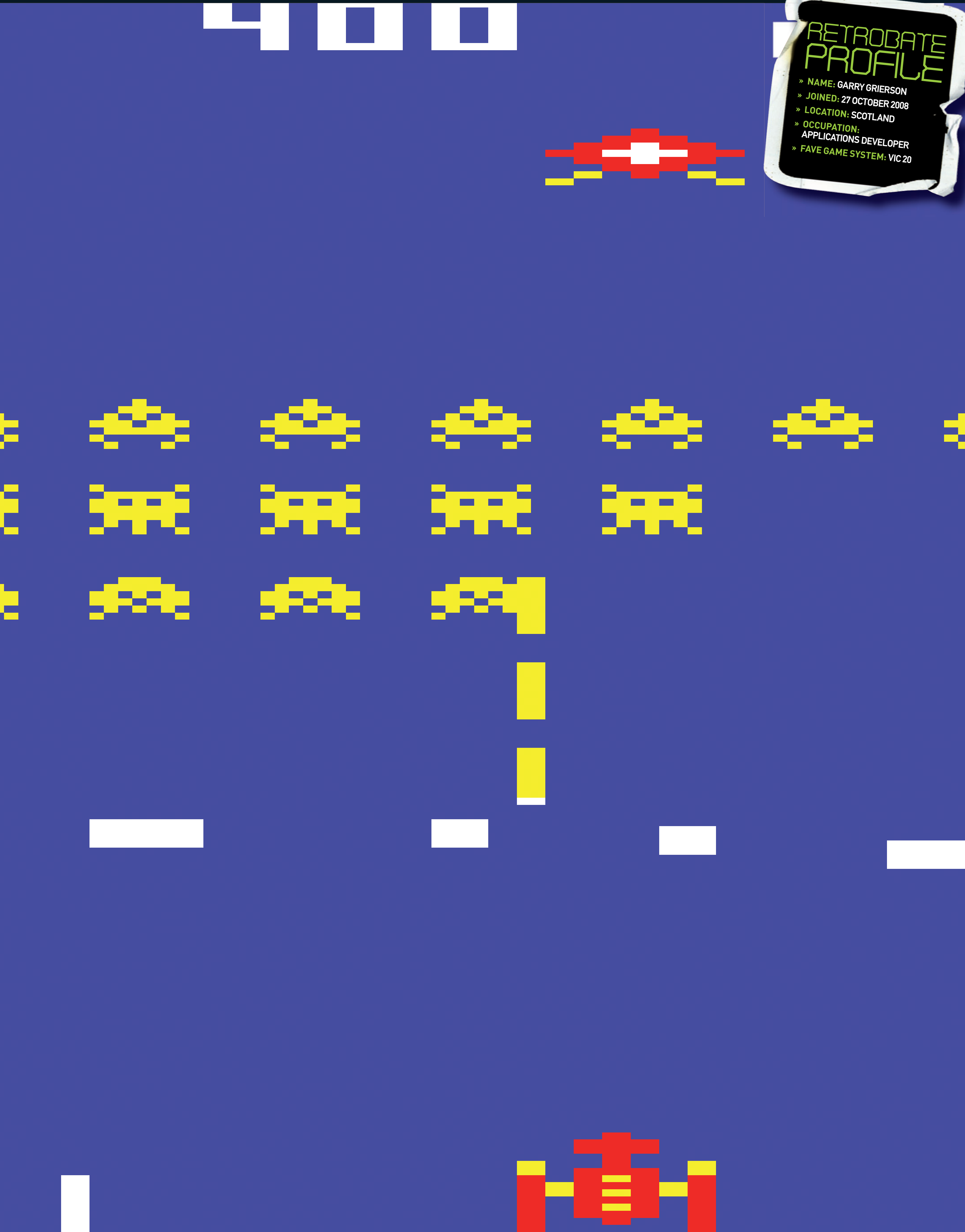
The large plastic slab-like object was inserted into his shiny white VIC-20 and a love affair soon began. The cartridge in question was *Gorf*, a port of the popular 1981 arcade game by Midway Games. You know, the one with the cool digitised speech. Anyway, at the time it received lukewarm reviews, but for me it was among a handful of VIC games that really stood out from the crowd.

It was the first multi-screen game I'd ever seen for the VIC-20 and the colourful graphics and pumping sound effects all served to pull my teenage self into the game. Unlike the original arcade version, all but one of the home computer ports had just four levels. The arcade machine's *Galaxians* level being dropped due to copyright issues. There's a *Space Invaders*-style first level, followed by a second level reminiscent of the brilliant *Phoenix*. The third stage is the vortex level in which enemies swirl out at you from the middle of the screen. The last level, meanwhile, features a huge mothership to take down. You have to blast your way through the ship's surface in order to shoot the core, resulting in a pretty impressive explosion for the humble VIC.

To me, the VIC version of this game was under appreciated. This is a good solid conversion that gets a lot out of the hardware and it's a shame it's not mentioned more. The graphics are larger and chunkier than the C64 version, but this only serves to fill up the screen. A lot of shoot-'em-ups from this era often had tiny character graphics and a lot of dead-screen area, but *Gorf* on the VIC managed to avoid this. Whether by design or chance, the resultant game had a certain something that made it stand out. This underrated classic deserves to be in anyone's top ten VIC games.

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net





RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** GARRY GRIERSON
- » **JOINED:** 27 OCTOBER 2008
- » **LOCATION:** SCOTLAND
- » **OCCUPATION:** APPLICATIONS DEVELOPER
- » **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** VIC 20

The Complete History Of FINAL FANTASY

Borne out of last-ditch desperation by a struggling creator, few imagined at its conception that Final Fantasy would become the RPG of a million fanfics. Such devotion is truly deserved, however, as **Samuel Roberts** discovers





As with any franchise, everyone has a favourite *Final Fantasy* – but rarely will two fans be unified by the same answer. Some will say it's *Final Fantasy VII*, the highest-selling in the series and arguably the most iconic in story and characters. A slew of people will highlight *VI*, praising it for unparalleled ambition and its complex, sprawling storyline. Hell, some will even argue that the original *Final Fantasy* is best, standing tall next to its pure JRPG, grind-heavy heritage. What's always been different about this series, however, is that no sequel can really be called that. Every numbered *Final Fantasy* instalment is practically an entire series in itself, complete with its own universe, cast and motifs. This risky creative process has created a series that tears audiences down the middle, provoking intense passion in many gamers but alienating others with its recurring rebellion storylines and moody teenage protagonists. Taking a step back and encompassing the series as a whole, however, it's clear that *Final Fantasy* has always been a progressive, relevant and ultimately fun series over its 22-year life.

With the recent release of *Dissidia: Final Fantasy*, we see the rich worlds of the mainline *Final Fantasy* games colliding in explosive fashion, sending fans into a head rush as they pit beloved protagonists against their most hated foes in an energetic melee. It's a measure of just how magnificently important the property has become as *Final Fantasy* crosses the boundaries of genre, something that its creator, Hironobu Sakaguchi, would never have begun to fathom upon the original game's creation.

Likely the most well-known behind-the-scenes story is that of how *Final Fantasy* got its infamously ironic name. Square Co Ltd, as it was known in the mid-Eighties, released a slew of Famicom titles in its short existence, but to pretty much zero success; Sakaguchi, who had joined the company when it was owned by construction firm Den-Yu-Sha, was behind some of these projects, released on a near-monthly basis in 1987, but their failure sent the company into freefall. As Square neared bankruptcy, Sakaguchi planned this to be his last videogame project – a 'Final' NES project, a 'Fantasy' game to be released before his return to university and Square's demise.

As we all know, though, this was far from the end for Sakaguchi and Square. *Final Fantasy* was one of several games created in the wake of then-rival Enix's *Dragon Quest*, which had quickly become the RPG of choice in Japan. In a *Famitsu* interview translated by *Develop* magazine, Sakaguchi reflected on the game's place in the market: "There were four games that were following on from *Dragon Quest*. *Final Fantasy* was one of those challengers." Sakaguchi reportedly had only a seven-man team on the original *Final Fantasy*, whereas the other development operation within Square had 20. "That's how I knew we really weren't popular," he reflects. Once the project was completed in late 1987, though, an even greater struggle within Square stood before him.

"Initially, only 200,000 copies of the game were going to be shipped. At that time, manufacturing the ROM took two to three months, so your initial shipment equalled the number of copies that you could potentially sell, so I

Q&A

Which is your favourite *Final Fantasy* and why?
The title whose ending I watched many times is *Final Fantasy V*. It's the game that made me want to work for Square Enix.

Also, I would mention *Final Fantasy Tactics*. Although it is not one of the numbered titles, I think it should be named as an excellent example of spin-offs from a series.

Dissidia: Final Fantasy is also a spin-off title and I sincerely hope it will become everyone's favourite game. No efforts will be spared by me to make it happen! Please give the game your full support!

Takeshi Arakawa

FINAL FANTASY



» [NES] Blank backgrounds and repeated sprites are a noticeable trait of the first three instalments.

argued within the company, and pleaded: 'If we only make this many, there's no chance of a sequel – please make it 400,000.' But the costs were high, so as a company all they could think was, 'That's a lot of money!'"

Thankfully, Square took the plunge, sold through the initial shipment and dug itself out of trouble. This wasn't a feat of chance, however: *Final Fantasy*, at the time, won through due to the merits of its design. Three years later, in 1990, it would find its way to the US.

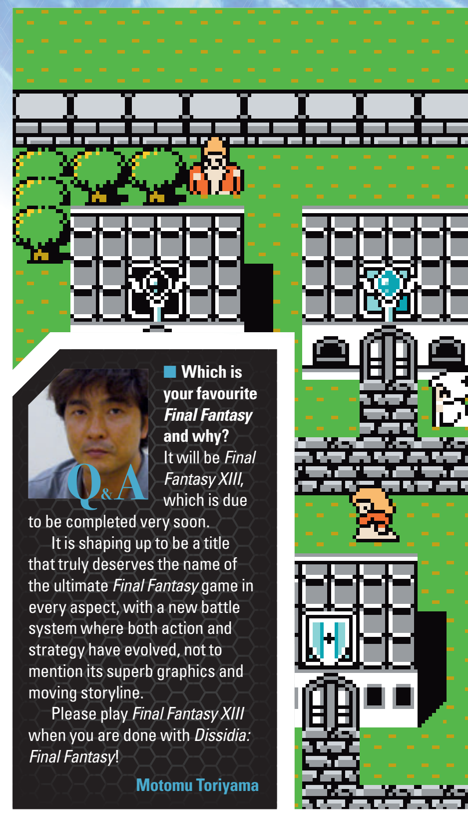
Led by the frankly bizarre, abstract character art of famed Japanese illustrator Yoshitaka Amano, *Final Fantasy* was a stunning-looking game considering the limits of its hardware, a winning combination of great art direction and use of the technology. Its basic storyline reflects nothing on the overblown characterisation that fans would learn of later on, relying instead on a classical yet surreal tale of faceless warriors overcoming an ambitiously cruel knight named Garland, against a backdrop of fantastical races and absurd prophecies.

Final Fantasy was the direct result of Sakaguchi's experiences, in a very emotional sense. Though the worlds were fantastical, he cites the most basic, everyday occurrences as the greatest influences, such as betrayal, love, discovery, compromise and personal encounters. Embellished versions of these themes encompassed the identity of the ensuing games, too, never straying too far from the creator's simple yet meaningful ideas.

As Sakaguchi had so cleverly foreseen, a follow-up to *Final Fantasy* was inevitable, but several new elements would be introduced in this sequel. Legendary recurring character Cid was introduced, as were the iconic yellow birds, Chocobos, but easily the most shocking change was the universal transformation of characters and storyline. Even though it was a sequel in the numerical sense, *Final Fantasy II* set a precedent for every entry in the series by starting afresh with new character, world and monster designs.

Final Fantasy II was released just a year after the first instalment, in December 1988, also on the NES. While many mechanics of the game's battles and exploration remained the same, the levelling-up system nixed traditional methods and went with something a little wilder. The player instead levelled up features like weapon proficiency, specific spells and so on – high-concept, in its day. Likewise, a multi-choice dialogue system, also unique to *II*, created an element of interaction with the story that was previously lacking.

While a translation was reportedly being prepared after the original made waves in the US, the massive gap between the Japanese and American releases of the first *Final Fantasy* meant that *FF II* would have had to be released



Q&A

Which is your favourite *Final Fantasy* and why?

It will be *Final Fantasy XIII*, which is due to be completed very soon.

It is shaping up to be a title that truly deserves the name of the ultimate *Final Fantasy* game in every aspect, with a new battle system where both action and strategy have evolved, not to mention its superb graphics and moving storyline.

Please play *Final Fantasy XIII* when you are done with *Dissidia: Final Fantasy*!

Motomu Toriyama

The Heroes

Hall of Champions

The classic heroes and

WARRIOR OF LIGHT (FINAL FANTASY)
Warrior saved hottie Princess Sarah in the first game, before leaving his homeland to stop the spread of evil. Unfortunately, he hit a snag: his enemy, Garland, was immortal. D'oh.

ONION KNIGHT (FINAL FANTASY III)
Referred to as Luneth in the DS version of *FF III*, Onion Knight is an orphan with skills in both sword and magic, depending, we assume, on what he decides to wear that day.

BARTZ KLAUSER (FINAL FANTASY V)
United with a unique group of individuals following a meteor crash, Bartz used to travel around with his pet Chocobo. Everything changed after a meteor collided with the earth, however.

CLOUD STRIFE (FINAL FANTASY VII)
Once deluded into thinking he was a member of elite faction SOLDIER, Cloud lost his love interest, his town and nearly his own life in bringing down the insane Sephiroth.

ZIDANE TRIBAL (FINAL FANTASY IX)
Zidane is a feisty, wandering thief, who gets into a world of trouble when he kidnaps Princess Garnet – who, it turned out, was okay with the whole thing. Has a hilarious monkey tail.

FIRION (FINAL FANTASY II)
In *FF II*, Firion and his companions were attacked by the Paramecian Empire, leading them to join a rebellion in an effort to topple their foe. Firion is talented with many different weapons.

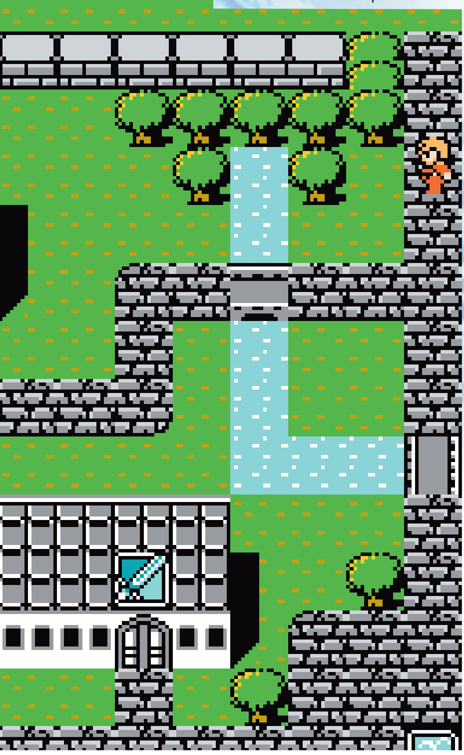
CECIL HARVEY (FINAL FANTASY IV)
Cecil once commanded the Red Wings airship fleet, but would be stripped of his rank when he refused to take questionable orders from the King. Eventually became a paladin.

TERRA BRANFORD (FINAL FANTASY VI)
A half-human, half-Esper being – not really sure how that happened – Terra is a troubled but overwhelmingly powerful girl who helped resistance group the Returners battle the Empire.

SQUALL LEONHART (FINAL FANTASY VIII)
The River Phoenix-alike, emo wielder of the Gunblade and an elite mercenary. Squall was raised at Balamb Garden, where children and teenagers are trained from a young age as soldiers (!).

TIDUS (FINAL FANTASY X)
Emotionally scarred by a tempestuous relationship with his father, Blitzball player Tidus is an agile, enthusiastic scamp who is revealed to be the dream of a god inside a whale. Huh?





» [NES] *Final Fantasy*'s marginal graphical advantage over *Dragon Quest* gave it distinction in the Japanese market.

alongside the SNES. From a business perspective, it made sense for Square to wait for a later instalment on the more lucrative platform. Western fans would have to wait until the 2003 compilation *Final Fantasy Origins*, on the PlayStation, in order to sample the game with an official translation. Without an initial Western release or high-profile remake, *FF II* easily remains the entry with the least exposure in our territory.

Shortly after the release of *Final Fantasy II*, a US subsidiary of Square was set up, known as Square Soft, Inc, in March 1989. Now the Japanese company was eyeing worldwide success with its surprise flagship series – the flood of non-*Final Fantasy* games from Square dried up, as the powerful franchise became the focus of the company. It wouldn't be the next game that took the series into the stratosphere, however, as *Final Fantasy III* became another Japan-only release. Remarkably, word of mouth was still spreading throughout its homeland, as the third game went on to sell more than the previous two NES games, shifting around 1.5 million copies, according to a 2003 Square Enix financial report.

FF III was the first in the series to offer an interchangeable class system, encouraging players to experiment with a range of daftly named jobs, such as Onion Knight and Bard, as well as more conventional Warrior and Mage classes. Like the previous two entries, random battles in the field were prevalent – this wouldn't change until much later in the series' lifespan – but the different job classes showed that Square was finally grasping how it could innovate with progression alongside the typical level-up grind. The job system was a first-class idea, giving players the chance to switch tactics until they had a combination that worked, even if the steep difficulty curve demanded constant revisions of class. A notable debut in *FF III* was the summon – a mythical creature, called into battle to assist the party – that would become a staple of every *Final Fantasy* to come in some form or another.

> **"Final Fantasy II set a series precedent by starting afresh with a new world and characters"**

The next game, *Final Fantasy IV*, would become the series' most story-heavy and interestingly conceived tale yet, as the franchise made the leap to the SNES. Not only this, but it would introduce the Active Time Battle system, where the fight would play out in real-time while the player made choices, a far cry from the 'wait' mechanic of previous games, which copied *Dragon Quest*'s method of freezing the encounter while players made choices. This brought a feeling of instinct into the series for the first time, and compared with knockout presentation that easily represented Amano's best character design yet, as well as inventive monster sprites and three gorgeous overworlds to explore – including the moon! – *Final Fantasy IV* was undeniably a milestone.

Yes, random battles returned, but it was arguably the most forgiving game in the series so far – an Easytype version of the game was even released in Japan, to extend appeal to new players. In an interview with Destructoid, series

The Villains

villains that make up the Dissidia: Final Fantasy cast

KUJA
(FINAL FANTASY IX)
A psychopath, but a flamboyant one, nevertheless. Kuja tried to destroy the city of Alexandria with Bahamut, which went well until the castle turned into an Eidolon and fought back…

SEPHIROTH
(FINAL FANTASY VII)
A former elite member of SOLDIER, Sephiroth tried to destroy the planet with Meteor magic after learning he was created in a lab. Has a penchant for torching public property.

EXDEATH
(FINAL FANTASY V)
Exdeath was once a tree that sealed up evil spirits, until it came to life and went bad itself. This was no Douglas fir, though – Exdeath had to be sealed away from civilisation.

CLOUD OF DARKNESS
(FINAL FANTASY III)
Only really appears briefly in *Final Fantasy III*. Cloud of Darkness aims to throw the world out of balance and swallow it with a force known as the Void. Possibly vulnerable to a gust of wind.

GARLAND
(FINAL FANTASY)
An absolute bastard of a villain that creates a time loop to keep himself alive forever. Garland was once a hero, apparently – maybe he started hanging out in the wrong crowd.

JECHT
(FINAL FANTASY X)
Tidus's father. Jecht disappeared from his homeland, only to end up becoming a giant, evil creature called Sin due to a bizarre religious technicality in the *Final Fantasy X* universe.

ULTIMECIA
(FINAL FANTASY VIII)
A sorceress who tried to use time compression to wipe out everything. It's speculated that Ultimecia is, in fact, the innocent Rinoa from *FF VIII* due to hints in the game's ending.

KEFKA PALAZZO
(FINAL FANTASY VI)
Kefka was a jester until an experiment, designed to give him magical powers, sent him insane and gave him delusions of grandeur. Once threw the world out of balance.

GOLBEZ
(FINAL FANTASY IV)
Once Cecil was out of the military, Golbez used his old air fleet to seek out the crystals in the world. There's something of a mind-bending twist to Golbez's identity – we won't ruin it…

THE EMPEROR
(FINAL FANTASY II)
The leader of the Paramecian Empire is a powerful mage, with a hunger for power that would stop at nothing in *Final Fantasy II*. Until he pissed off the wrong people, that is…

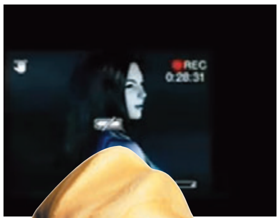


The Five Greatest Moments of Final Fantasy

Nothing from Final Fantasy X-2, then

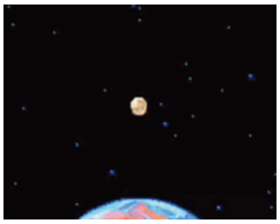
05 THE CAMCORDER ENDING (FINAL FANTASY VIII)

Definitely the most unique ending of any *Final Fantasy* game, the credits sequence in *Final Fantasy VIII* is the least convoluted scene in JRPG history. This is the characters behaving like people, having fun and summing up their relationships – which have been slowly constructed over the past 60 hours, remember – on a camcorder. There's no voice acting, just very human-like animation, plus an overall happiness that doesn't border on the cheesy – until the battery just happens to run out when Squall's filming Rinoa, of course. Gets marks for ignoring all the sorceress nonsense on the last disc.



04 TO THE MOON ON THE LUNAR WHALE (FINAL FANTASY IV)

The true moment that knocked gamers' socks off with *Final Fantasy IV* was this scenario, when players obtained the Lunar Whale, similar to the airships of old but with a twist: it could bloody well go into space. Suddenly, the basic overworld we'd seen in *Final Fantasy* games up until this point was no longer the limit of Sakaguchi's imagination, as Square showed us how much punch the SNES had versus the NES in one beautiful panning shot of the stars. This was also a turning point for the pace of the fourth instalment, as the game quite literally rocketed to its thrilling conclusion.



03 ARIA DE MEZZO CARATERRE (FINAL FANTASY VI)

In order to acquire the only airship in the continent, owned by the devilish Setzer, Celes poses as the opera singer Maria to distract him. Celes could look at the script before the opera took place, where players even had to remember the next line to keep it going. This moment wouldn't have nearly the impact it does were it not for Nobuo Uematsu's absolutely staggering *Aria De Mezzo Caraterre*, an opera somehow communicated through 16-bit sound technology to amazing effect. A beautiful moment in *Final Fantasy* history, and one worth experiencing again and again.



02 THE SENDING OF KILIKA (FINAL FANTASY X)

Spira, the world of *Final Fantasy X*, has many of its own customs and rules. For one, the dead must be 'sent' by a summoner, or else their spirits become fiends. Prior to this beautiful scene, an entire island community, Kilika, is devastated by the terrifying monster, Sin. *Final Fantasy X* has a lot of thematic flaws, but the way it handles the cycle of life is fascinating; this is the first time players see a Sending taking place in *Final Fantasy X*. As Yuna performs her melancholic dance across the water, sending the spirits of the dead into the sunset, players are hardly likely to forget it.



01 AERIS'S DEATH (FINAL FANTASY VII)

Only the most deluded fan could argue this wasn't the series' defining moment, as Aeris Gainsborough, the flower girl who was the last of the Ancients in the *Final Fantasy VII* world, was murdered by Sephiroth as she prayed for the planet's salvation in a shocking and heartbreaking twist. The preceding hours made no hint that she would perish, but it's a moment that hit gamers hard everywhere, owing much thanks to Uematsu's *Aeris's Theme* for emotional impact. Actually, every moment on this list owes something to his compositions, a measure of his importance to the series' development.







» [PS2] Voice acting dogs the *Final Fantasy X* experience, yet its innovation in character progression deserves acclaim.

composer Nobuo Uematsu said that there was a sense of growing fervour over the series abroad: "When *Final Fantasy IV* was being made, I knew that the game would be popular in Japan, but I also felt and sensed that people outside Japan were becoming more interested in the series."

FF IV was released as *FF II* in the US, so as not to confuse audiences by skipping two instalments. Ambition had heightened on Sakaguchi's part, so, in tandem with the thick artistic detail enabled by the SNES hardware, *Final Fantasy IV* instantly became a fan favourite. The twist-heavy tale of Cecil, the series' first multi-layered and conflicted hero, would come to be a fondly remembered tale in the series, and the Active Time Battle system was seen as so progressive that it became a mainstay from this point onwards.

Final Fantasy V was another Japanese-only release, featuring a full-featured version of the job system from *III*, enabling maximum customisation of the party in unprecedented ways – abilities from one character class could be mixed with another, for example. The story pales next to *IV*, though, giving fans a less than fascinating good-versus-evil yarn most notable due to the death of a major character, the amnesiac King Galuf. Fans wouldn't see any job mechanic re-emerge until *Final Fantasy XI*. Tetsuya Nomura, who would later go on to design entire rosters of iconic characters in *Final Fantasy* lore, became the only artist to ever join Yoshitaka Amano on character art duties, designing monsters for *Final Fantasy V*.

Final Fantasy VI came in 1994, essentially perfecting aspects of the previous two games that were lacking. The story, now a sprawling steampunk epic with numerous interweaving plot threads, was rightfully hailed as the best to date. The combat was easy to grasp, as ATB appeared for the third time running, perfected in structure and learning curve. Notably, Yoshinori Kitase worked on the game as director, the first time Sakaguchi wasn't exclusively performing this role himself, though he remained a designer and producer on the game. The results were stunning, illustrating just how the once-endangered Square had become an RPG master in less than a decade.

Oddly, Squaresoft in the US decided to skip releasing *V* and go straight for *VI*, sticking to its still-incorrect numbering system, releasing it as *III* over there. Meanwhile, Europe hadn't even had a taste of the acclaimed series, despite its rapid inflation in popularity. Three years later, however, in 1997, the impact of this notoriously Japanese series would go meteoric on an international stage.

Something significant happened in between the development of *VI* and *VII*, as the hardware generation shifted.

Square, which had a positive relationship with Nintendo after releasing the six games across the NES and SNES, reportedly opted to develop the game on Sony's new PlayStation console due to its high-capacity CD-ROM format, necessary for the game's hour-plus of full-motion video sequences and seamless cut-scene to gameplay transitions. "As a result of using a lot of motion data plus CG effects in still images it turned out to be a mega-capacity game, and therefore we had to choose CD-ROM as a media," Sakaguchi explained in an interview commemorating the release of *VII*. This started a rift between Nintendo and Square, lasting across an entire generation as Square exclusively made PlayStation and PC software.

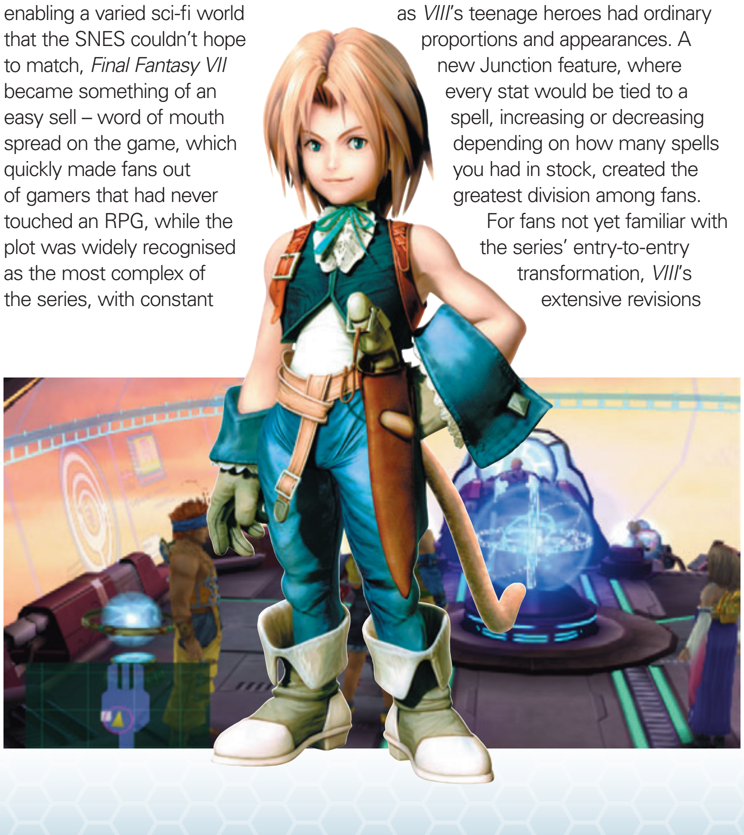
Moving to the PlayStation turned out to be a blessing for the series. *Final Fantasy VII* arrived in 1997, quickly earning justifiably high praise from critics and jaw-dropping sales at retail. With Amano absent as character designer, Nomura stepped in and created a whole cast of memorable heroes and villains, including spiky-haired amnesiac Cloud, machine gun-armed Barret, flower girl/Ancient Aeris and, of course, Cloud's nemesis, the silver-haired flame-walking evil-doer, Sephiroth. *FF VII* was also the first *Final Fantasy* game to ever be released in Europe, while Squaresoft sensibly ditched the inane numbering system of *I*, *IV* and *VI*, deciding to name this *VII* since everyone was too enraptured by the hype to care any more.

With the powerful 3D technology enabling a varied sci-fi world that the SNES couldn't hope to match, *Final Fantasy VII* became something of an easy sell – word of mouth spread on the game, which quickly made fans out of gamers that had never touched an RPG, while the plot was widely recognised as the most complex of the series, with constant flashbacks, less clichéd dialogue and encouraging levels of characterisation. Not only this, but the unprecedented move of killing off main love interest Aeris on the first disc (out of three), after spending hours establishing her as a part of the story, came as a colossal shock to gamers, the sequence of her murder by Sephiroth instantly earning a place in videogame history.

Though sarcastically referred to as the most returned game of all time – try finding a cheap copy of the game now – due to the hype perhaps overselling it, *Final Fantasy VII* became the second bestselling game on the PlayStation after *Gran Turismo*, a huge victory for a franchise that didn't seem destined for worldwide success upon its creation a decade before. The CD-ROM format gave artists the scope to construct fantastical, colourful environments that they'd never even tried on the SNES, as varied as a theme park, a seaside resort town, a sunken submarine and even a grimy city that straps on a huge cannon to defend itself. Having three discs at its disposal, as well as a towering production budget, generated a magisterial *Final Fantasy* adventure that its fans would remember forever.

Following it up was the difficult part. *Final Fantasy VIII* arrived two years later, certain to sell a ton due to the reputation of *VII*, but, as was the nature of the series, wasn't close to being the same game. Nomura returned as character designer, his art no doubt deemed a factor in *FF VII*'s commercial success. Gone were the blocky sprites, as *VIII*'s teenage heroes had ordinary proportions and appearances. A new Junction feature, where every stat would be tied to a spell, increasing or decreasing depending on how many spells you had in stock, created the greatest division among fans.

For fans not yet familiar with the series' entry-to-entry transformation, *VIII*'s extensive revisions



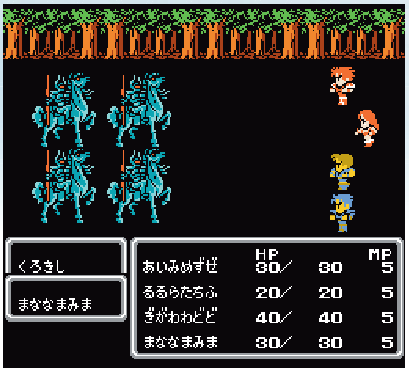


Q&A

Which is your favourite *Final Fantasy* and why?

Final Fantasy VII. It turned out to be a game where challenging elements that were lacking in previous *Final Fantasy* titles are beautifully covered: 3D graphics, interactive movies and a story with mysterious touches. It therefore gave me a real sense of achievement when the project was completed.

Yoshinori Kitase



» [NES] *Final Fantasy II* dabbled more in story. Naming its characters was a big step.

The Five Best Final Fantasy Spin-Offs

Because there are rubbish ones, too…



01 FINAL FANTASY TACTICS (PSONE, 1997)

Tactics triumphantly took *Final Fantasy* and applied it to the traditional strategic RPG template, bringing with it all the hallmarks and iconography that fans love. You're better off getting the enhanced PSP version, *War Of The Lions*, which comes with a wireless multiplayer feature. The PSone edition never made it here.



02 CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII (PSP, 2008)

A prequel to the bestselling instalment of the series, *Crisis Core* is a real-time action game following the exploits of minor *FF VII* character and Aeris' boyfriend Zack Fair. *Crisis Core* provides new depth to the *VII* saga, plus it has the greatest ending of any *Final Fantasy* game.



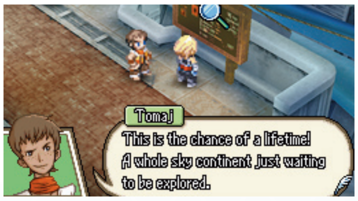
03 KINGDOM HEARTS (PS2, 2003)

Not the second one, which faltered due to its lamely overcomplicated storyline, but the first *Kingdom Hearts* game took beloved characters of the *Final Fantasy* universe, redesigned them, and threw them into the Disney universe. Sephiroth was a surprise boss battle, while players would run into Squall, Cid Highwind, Cloud and Aeris.



04 DISSIDIA: FINAL FANTASY (PSP, 2009)

This beat-'em-up/RPG hybrid is way better than Square's last attempt at an *FF* fighting game, the forgotten *Ehrgeiz*. *Dissidia* provides layers of fan service, hours of gameplay and countless opportunities to watch heroes and villains hit each other until health bars are depleted. Lovely.



05 FINAL FANTASY XII: REVENANT WINGS (DS, 2008)

The second direct follow-up to a *Final Fantasy* game, *Revenant Wings* is a strategy RPG, of all things. Thankfully, it works very well despite too much clutter on the touch screen, failing only slightly, later on, when the difficulty spikes a little out of control. Beautiful for a DS game.

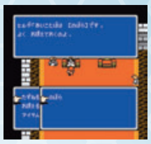
A Thousand Years of Dreams

The storylines of the Final Fantasy universe



FINAL FANTASY

After four elemental orbs are blacked out, four nameless – until you name them – warriors of light emerge to save the world from darkness, as it was foretold. They must thwart the dastardly Garland, responsible for the world's sorry state. By travelling to the future and destroying his true form, they can restore it to health.



FINAL FANTASY II

Four young people are assaulted by the Paramecian Army at the beginning of *Final Fantasy II*. They are then summoned by the Princess of Flynn, where, not too long later, they become part of a resistance faction and embark on a mission of revenge against the army. Many twists follow…



FINAL FANTASY III

Four orphans are imbued with the power of a crystal, after waking up in a cave mysteriously. They're told to restore balance to the world, which doesn't make sense until later on, when the evil Xandu makes the continents float in the sky. It all turns out to be the work of an evil force, called the Cloud of Darkness.



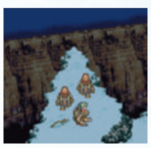
FINAL FANTASY IV

Stripped of the Red Wings airship fleet that he commands after disobeying the once-good King, Cecil is sent away on a task that puts him on the path to redemption, eventually becoming a paladin. He must face the nasty Golbez, who appears to be the main villain until a certain twist occurs.



FINAL FANTASY V

After the winds slow and a meteorite hits the earth, a group of people are brought together as if by fate, only to discover that the four elemental crystals have been destroyed. These were preventing the evil Exdeath from escape; when he does, havoc reigns once more and the party seeks to bring him down.



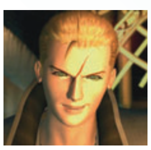
FINAL FANTASY VI

Summarising *VI*'s story is near-impossible – essentially, this is the story of a group of rebels, known as the Returners, battling an empire that is eventually led by a crazy jester, Kefka. Of course, there are about 10,000 subplots, most of which are validating but too detailed to describe in-depth here.



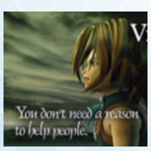
FINAL FANTASY VII

Mentalist Sephiroth summons Meteor, a magical force powerful enough to wipe out every living thing on the planet. Standing in his way is Cloud and company, who search for a way to stop the nearing magic from colliding with the planet. It takes a greater force than the party to stop it, though…



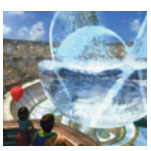
FINAL FANTASY VIII

A group of mercenaries is hired to assassinate the sorceress Edea, who is spreading her influence throughout the world. Unfortunately, the real threat is from the future, where the sorceress Ultimecia looks to compress time, destroying every living thing and leaving her the only remaining force in the universe.



FINAL FANTASY IX

Zidane and a few thieves plan on kidnapping Princess Garnet, who's becoming concerned by the behaviour of Queen Brahne. Thus, she lets herself get kidnapped. The Queen sends troops after them, at least until she's killed and replaced by Kuja, who turns out to have more links to Zidane than we first assumed.



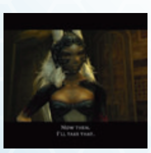
FINAL FANTASY X

Seemingly thrown 1,000 years into the future, a young man named Tidus encounters a Summoner called Yuna, who sets out to destroy the evil creature known as Sin. The problem, as we learn, is that defeating it will result in her death. Eventually, her refusal to do so sees the party hunted by the native religion, Yevon.



FINAL FANTASY XI

The original premise of the *FF* MMO was that a Shadow Lord threatened the three nations in the game, explaining the prevalence of monsters throughout the land. Over the expansions, however, it's shifted away from this, with the latest pack, *Kupo D'Etat*, promising a chilling story in Moogle lore. Ooh!



FINAL FANTASY XII

Princess Ashe of Dalmasca loses her husband, Prince Rasler, in the Archadian Empire's invasion of Nabradia. Years later, she sets out with street urchins Vaan and Penelo, the pilot Balthier, a supposed traitor called Basch and a Vieran warrior named Fran to take revenge.

> **"The sequence of Aeris's murder by Sephiroth instantly earned a place in videogame history"**

came as a bit of a shock. Its characters, including the River Phoenix-inspired grump, Squall Leonhart, were celebrated, even if its soapy and often insane storyline was not. *FF VIII* had massive sales, arguably by default, and would be as engaging as its predecessor, as long as the player was willing to invest time into the Junction system.

With *IX*, Sakaguchi returned the series to its roots, nixing sci-fi in favour of a classical medieval theme. Not so surprisingly, he cited it as his favourite *Final Fantasy* in 2000, and, given that it was the last one he worked on in day-to-day operations, we wouldn't expect that to have changed in the meantime. "This title is based on a reflection of all the previous works in the series," he said. "The coming instalment is my favourite. It's closest to my ideal view of what *Final Fantasy* should be."

Sakaguchi used *IX* to nostalgically hark back to *Final Fantasy* games of yore, seen in its traditional levelling-up progression and in visual instances, such as the appearance of the character Vivi. Yoshitaka Amano returned with Toshiyuki Itahana to design the more unconventional, cartoon-like cast.

The title arrived late in the PlayStation's lifespan, which would see the lowest sales for a *Final Fantasy* game since *VI*, though still higher than all pre-*VII* titles by a significant margin. Critical response was, as ever, appreciative – but at this point, Square had been examining the potential of what the DVD format could do for its games on the PS2. *Final Fantasy X*, a tremendously ambitious project put together by high-ranking members of the *VII* team, took things in an entirely new direction upon its 2001 release (2002 in the UK).

The game's world, called Spira, didn't adhere to any established fantasy or sci-fi conventions; it was fantastical, yes, but also tropical, heavily religious and oppressive as a result. The main character, Tidus, was unusually chirpy for a *Final Fantasy* protagonist, yet *X* attracted the most attention from the press because it was the first entry to feature full voice acting. This wasn't an entirely successful move, to put it generously, as the cast fought its way through a blunderous lip-syncing job by the developer, only for the end result to be cringeworthy at best.

More successful were the changes made to the RPG template. The combat threw ATB out the window, opting for a battle system dependent on time management – it's more interesting than it sounds – called the Conditional Turn-Based Battle system; it was an exciting, well-paced and necessary transition for the series. Levelling up received an overhaul with the Sphere Grid, a giant hub where stats were augmented, bit by bit. Here, players moved around a giant grid, essentially buying stats and abilities of their own choosing. It was the most customisable *Final Fantasy* game to date – any character, regardless of starting abilities, could learn anything – garnering the series a popular press response and smashing 6 million-plus sales. Readers of Japanese gaming magazine *Famitsu* even went on to vote *FF X* as their favourite game of all time, beating every *Dragon Quest* and even *Final Fantasy VII* to the post.

Next came *Final Fantasy XI*, the MMO that never quite took off with the core *FF* user base due to the unfortunate requirement of a PS2 hard drive and its late release in the US. Unjustifiably, Square Enix didn't bother to release *XI* on the PS2 in the UK, instead opting for the easier-to-sell PC version. At its peak, *Final Fantasy XI* had 500,000 active subscribers, a decent figure in MMO terms but not quite a success in the grand scheme of *Final Fantasy*, which had upwards of 6 million fans based on *FF X*'s sales figures.

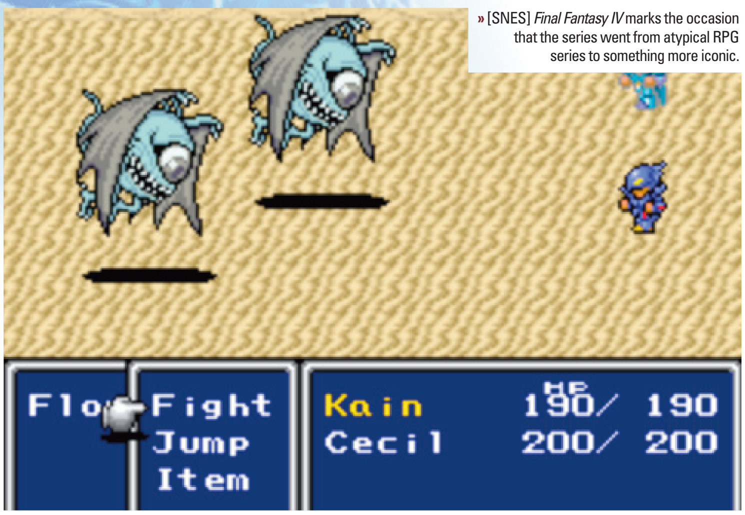
Following a few torrid years after the *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* movie bombed, which led to Sakaguchi leaving the company, Square merged







» [PS2] *Final Fantasy XII* took the bold creative step of introducing boredom to the series.



» [SNES] *Final Fantasy IV* marks the occasion that the series went from atypical RPG series to something more iconic.



» [360] We'd wager that 10 per cent of the *Final Fantasy* fan base followed the series online with *FF XI*.



with its biggest competitor, Enix, to form the RPG giant Square Enix in 2002. Policy changes clearly affected the popular series. After *Final Fantasy X*'s success, reassuring Square that *IX*'s tepid performance wasn't a sign of declining popularity, the company made an unprecedented move and created a direct sequel to the PS2 game called *Final Fantasy X-2*.

When *Final Fantasy X-2* came along in early 2004, fans finally got a chance to look at a *Final Fantasy* world post-storyline – not counting the Japan-only *FF V* anime follow-up, *Legend Of The Crystals*. *X-2* made summoner Yuna the new protagonist. Previously a rather repressed character in the original game, *X-2* saw Yuna inexplicably trading in her demure ceremonial robes for some hot pants and a pop career, and her summoning rod for twin pistols. For the first time, players began with an airship, meaning the whole world and story was entirely open after the first hour.

Final Fantasy X-2 is best described as fan service for idiots, layered with pop music and soppy romance. Tonal mishaps include a disturbing massage mini-game, a creepy bikini-clad scene set in a hot spring and a new version of *FF X*'s winning mini-game Blitzball, which savaged the RPG-meets-sport brilliance of the original in favour of a rather shite management simulator.

What *X-2* showed was that Square Enix was willing to treat the franchise less religiously, capitalising on people's love for a single universe and creating more stories within it. *Final Fantasy X* had become a franchise within a franchise; *VII* would naturally follow suit, spawning good-if-you're-a-fan sequel movie *Advent Children*, okay PS2 shoot-'em-up and Vincent Valentine spin-off *Dirge Of Cerberus* and, lastly, the essential *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* on the PSP. Gaps were being plugged for the millions of fans who discovered the series later on, too, with every game from *I* to *VI* made available worldwide starting with *Final Fantasy Anthology* in 1999 and continuing throughout the next decade.

The main instalments of the series hadn't been neglected while all this franchise expansion was going on. *XII* had been in development for a longer than expected time, due to numerous behind-the-scenes factors, primarily the ill health of director Yasumi Matsuno, who had to be replaced early on. For the first time ever, random battles were banished from *Final Fantasy* as *XII* finally made the combat real-time, a change that was a long time coming to the franchise.

Critical reception was exceptionally positive, though fans were divided by the results of the transition. Scrapping random battles was an important step for the series and it made the sandy world of Ivalice more immersive, but the laborious, planning-intensive and excitement-free combat didn't match up to everybody's expectations. Attention is now focused on *Final Fantasy XIII*, out next year, which reunites key members of the *VII* and *X* teams on a project that has now been gestating for five years.

Waiting for a new release isn't necessarily what *Final Fantasy* fans are most interested in, however. The recent re-release of *Final Fantasy VII* on the PlayStation Store saw it sell 100,000 copies in less than two weeks, a remarkable validation of a 12-year-old game that people are still, evidently, falling in love with – and begging Square Enix to remake. The adoration of this franchise doesn't end at *VII*, though – rather, it begins here, and as Square Enix gradually finds new ways of reissuing the oldest tales in the series, the less mainstream masterpieces like *V* and *VI* are finally garnering deserved attention. The very fact that these retro titles can tap into a new audience just shows us what the *Final Fantasy* series has accomplished. It's become the guiding light for all Japanese RPGs, one of the few remaining that haven't paled into insignificance through complacency.

With its penchant for reinvention in tow, we doubt there ever will be an actual *Final Fantasy*. It's that classic tale of success that is the most humbling about this series; the idea that Hironobu Sakaguchi, anticipating failure before release, creates a rule-breaking series that spawns a phenomenon that its army of fans would have genuine love and admiration for. For this, we celebrate *Final Fantasy* not only as a videogame series, but as a pop-culture landmark.

Q&A

Which is your favourite *Final Fantasy* and why?
Final Fantasy VIII. It is a memorable work for me as I was involved with it as the producer throughout the project. If you get the opportunity to play the game, please have a go!
Shinji Hashimoto

The Interview

We chat to game director Takeshi Arakawa about Dissidia



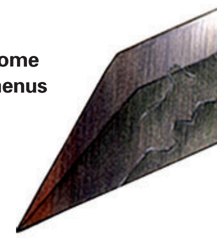


» Takeshi Arakawa

■ Why turn *Final Fantasy* into a beat-'em-up with *Dissidia: Final Fantasy*?
The idea of this game originally came along when we were making *Kingdom Hearts*, hit upon by the *Kingdom Hearts* team and Mr Nomura. There was someone making a simple suggestion that it would be nice to make a beat-'em-up of *Final Fantasy*. However, Square already had some DreamFactory titles at that time such as *The Bouncer* and *Ehrgeiz*, and we thought it would be wise to put the concept on hold until the time was ripe for it, as it were.

Then the dormant project was reactivated as *Final Fantasy* was going to celebrate its 20th anniversary. A new development team of younger staff was subsequently formed, although many of them had been in the *Kingdom Hearts II* team.

■ What other fighting games did you draw inspiration from?
The team members had played the bulk of the beat-'em-ups before and had a wish to make something different. While I expect all of those titles inspired us in one way or another, the biggest inspiration must have come from *Kingdom Hearts II*. You can see a remnant of *Kingdom Hearts II*'s 'reaction command' in the system of *Dissidia: Final Fantasy*.



■ Is there a concern that some will find *Dissidia*'s many menus and fairly complex battle system frustrating?
We had the same overwhelming concern! When we set off to make something completely new, we tend to end up with a huge bagful of ideas. This is a common occurrence in the way we make things at Square Enix. Any team led by Mr Nomura always spends more time finding out exactly what 'playground' their fans would like to have rather than worrying about the risk that it might require the player to jump over a hurdle of a certain height before enjoying it. In other words, despite the risk it involved, we wanted to offer our top priority to those who would really enjoy playing this game. We are aware that no challenge can be taken without risks. So, while I am sorry for gamers who have experienced some frustration initially, I would like them to hang in there for a bit longer and enjoy a conversation with us in the meantime.

I think the most important thing for us is to engage ourselves in a conversation continuously with our fans through the game until such frustration eventually disappears.

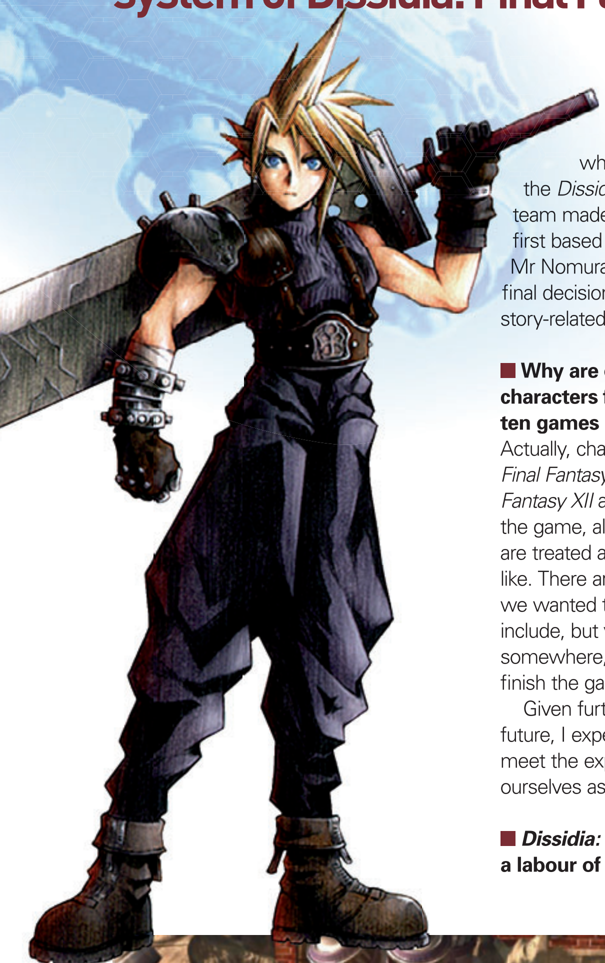
■ How did you decide on what characters to include in *Dissidia*?
We made the selection for two main reasons: the







“You can see a remnant of Kingdom Hearts II’s gameplay in the system of Dissidia: Final Fantasy”



characters who offer different types of gameplay amongst them and those who would visually stand out in the *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* story. The team made their recommendations first based on actual gameplay before Mr Nomura made the final decision in view of story-related aspects.



» [PSP] *Dissidia* is a fanboy’s delight, collecting many of the most beloved characters in the series.

■ Why are only characters from the first ten games included?
Actually, characters from *Final Fantasy XI* and *Final Fantasy XII* also appear in the game, although they are treated as guests, if you like. There are many other characters we wanted to, and would still like to include, but you have to draw the line somewhere, otherwise we would never finish the game.

Given further opportunities in the future, I expect that we would be able to meet the expectations – expectations of ourselves as well as fans.

■ *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* is obviously a labour of love as far as fan service goes. Is it fun revisiting all the old franchises?
I was actually involved with the development of *Final Fantasy VIII* and *Final Fantasy IX*, but *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* is the most nostalgic *Final Fantasy* title I have made. It was such fun making it as the team members were generally quite young and are *Final Fantasy* fans themselves.

■ What makes *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* stand out from other fighting games?
The battle with multiple aspects is one. As the character’s level continues to go up, the situation keeps changing every minute every day. I believe that it is innovative that the player has to go through battles under different conditions each time. A system called ‘Brave’ has been employed to support the player in this aspect. It may be difficult to understand the system intuitively unless you actually play it.



Another point is the fact that the player can bounce around freely in the 3D space. Although there certainly is no shortage of games where you can fly around freely with a game system built on two axes, I doubt very much that many titles offer the ability of making such an exhaustive use of the space on three axes.

■ Why has *Final Fantasy* remained so popular with gamers?
When I looked down at the series objectively as a player, my conclusion was: ‘What *Final Fantasy* boils down to is challenge.’ I would expect that *Final Fantasy* will continue to be presented in new forms in future. I can express my conclusion in such melodramatic words because the history of *Final Fantasy* is being created by its fans.

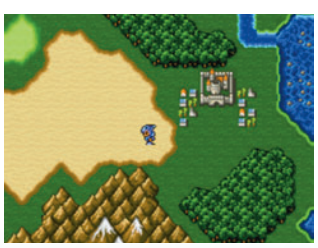
■ How long does the typical *Final Fantasy* game take to create?
I would say that it takes about two years to produce one, although I have not been involved with *Final Fantasy* long enough to talk generally. As for time needed for mapping out ideas, it varies from one director/producer to another.

■ Where do you see the franchise in another ten years?
The *Final Fantasy* series is not an IP based on a fixed ideology, which, in my personal opinion, makes it fundamentally different from other existing serialised titles. That is to say that the *Final Fantasy* series should always be there in every era to come, and it is possible that you who are reading this now might be working for it as a director.

■ Why is each game set in its own separate world?
That is because the directors and producers always own different worlds in their heads from one to another. I understand that, although each *Final Fantasy* title carries a number, the whole series is recognised as a type of entertainment. Personally, I regard it almost like a festival that never fails to surprise you at each event.







CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retro gaming it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

DUCK TALES

- » **SYSTEM:** NES
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



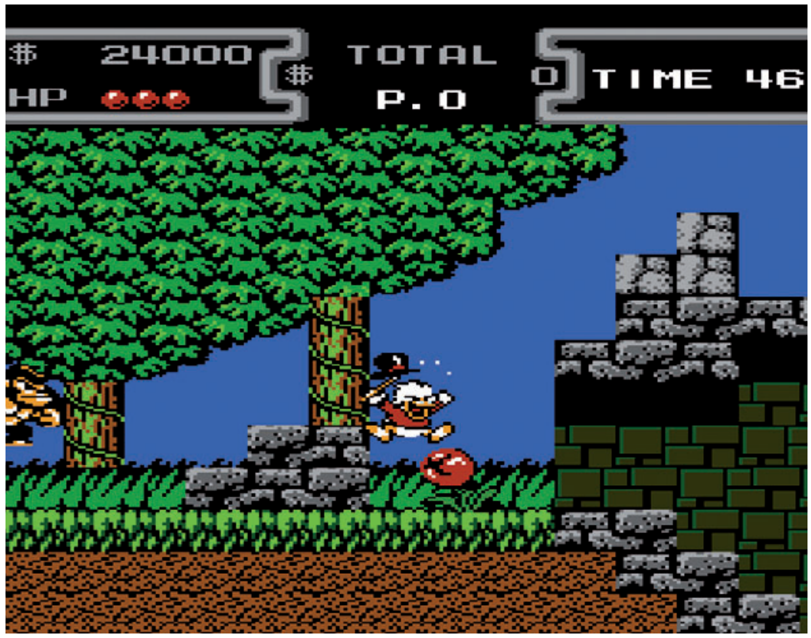
» [NES] Not all is well with Scrooge's nephews, but they do give handy tips.

Who knows how Scrooge McDuck would have fared in the current recession or, indeed, how he felt about the game *Duck Tales* being included in a section of a magazine entitled Cheap As Chips. Proud that he had enough cash to feather his nest, and perhaps pleased that one of his gaming ventures proved so enduring.

Capcom's *Duck Tales* pits players as the Glaswegian miserly uncle of Donald in a mission to travel the world in search of treasure. Players are armed with a cane, which can be used to whack objects aside, defeat enemies, or use as a pogo stick. Over the five levels, the latter comes in very handy indeed, but battling a host of enemies alone is no fun so Scrooge is accompanied by his nephews Huey, Dewey and Louie, who dish out handy tips.

It's easy to dismiss *Duck Tales* as a mere platformer, staple fare even back then. But even when viewed in contemporary times, *Duck Tales* was a lesson in design, a game that took barely ten minutes to rattle through if you went from A to B, but would eat up an afternoon if you played it properly.

By 'properly', we mean slaying the bad guys and collecting the treasure, two of which are hidden. When all five levels are up, you are sent to Transylvania for a final boss fight, the ending of the game depending on what you've done previously. Whenever you complete a level and defeat a boss – by a combination of memory and button-pressing – you receive $1 million, yet to see the good ending you need $10 million. And for that, you have to explore.



» [NES] Scrooge McDuck looks pretty mad at what looks like a tomato here. In actual fact, he's been hit by a deadly flower.

The way the levels are constructed means exploration is a joy. Each stage works in roughly the same way, albeit with different graphics and foes. Stand Scrooge next to an object, push the D-pad towards it, watch his tail wag and then swing the cane with a tap of the B-button. Or leap into the air, hold down and the B-button and pogo like mad.

With a little practice you'll have this down to a tee, and although it sounds simplistic, it does make for some interesting platform puzzling. You end up playing with one eye on what's coming next so that you can combine moves swiftly, ensuring you keep your three lives intact.

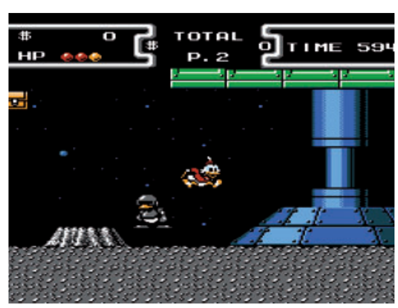
But in some ways you don't really mind being thrust back to the start upon death. Sometimes you look back at games created in 1989 – *Duck Tales* didn't come to Europe until 1990 – and can't help wincing at the graphics. Not so with *Duck Tales*. Gloriously cartoon-like, the movement, reaction and animation of Scrooge McDuck is hilarious and incredibly well polished.

The fact that *Duck Tails* was put together by some of the people who worked on Capcom's *Mega Man* franchise is no surprise since there are some similarities. It helped the publisher shift 1.67 million copies of the game, and there can be no complaints. One upshot of this is that it makes it relatively easy to track a copy down for around a fiver. Why anyone would actually want to part with it is another question entirely.





» [NES] Sorry, boss, but Scrooge is going to have to get rid of you.



» [NES] In space, no one can hear you quack.

BOSS/RUSH

WHERE WE SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

ALBERT WESKER



GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** PSONE
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM



» [360/PS3] His appearance in the latest iteration of the franchise saw him don a *Matrix*-inspired black ensemble to round off his superhuman abilities.



» [Saturn] The Sega Saturn-exclusive Battle mode had a zombie Wesker that could be found in one of the lab rooms.

Despite being the most regular character to haunt seminal survival-horror series *Resident Evil*, Wesker is perhaps the most elusive adversary in modern gaming history. The architect of some of the series' most gruesome biological weapons, his tall, dark appearance, vindictive schemes and sprawling, nonsensical dialogue give him the essential trappings of a classic villain.

Although he has given Chris and Jill the run-around for over 13 years, his debut appearance was far less cold and calculated. Starring in the priceless live-action opening to the original *Resident Evil*, he appears wearing Rick Astley's shades and slicked-back yellow hair, before running into the pitch-black fog with his tail between his legs. But as soon as he entered the mansion, he became an entirely different beast.

Appearing only to provide a conveniently timed helping hand and deliver a nonchalant comment, the climax of the game revealed that the Alpha Team leader was running the show. As a double agent working for Umbrella, Wesker tested his biological weapons against Jill, Chris and Barry but ended up becoming skewered by his masterpiece, the Tyrant. The survivors escaped, thinking he was dead, but it would never be that easy.

Although another two games went by, it wasn't until *Code Veronica* that Wesker's fate was fully revealed. After sneakily injecting himself with an untested virus moments before his death, he gained superhuman strength and speed and set off to work for a rival company that was after the elusive T-Veronica virus. Travelling to a zombie-ridden island and eventually Antarctica, he failed to destroy nemesis Chris Redfield but managed to get the sample he came for.

Despite appearances in three subsequent games – *Resident Evil Zero*, *Resident Evil 4* and *The Umbrella Chronicles* – it wasn't until *Resident Evil 5* that you could go toe-to-toe with Wesker in a fight. Undefeatable and with a puppet Jill Valentine by his side, successfully surviving his onslaught of *Matrix* moves led you to his ship that contained his master plan: to infect the planet with the Uroboros parasite and rule it as a god.

And so begins one of the most farcical ending boss fights of all time. After weakening him with a rocket, which he can catch and throw back at you, and chasing him onto a plane, you crash land inside a conveniently placed volcano. Absorbing the parasite to become the most fearsome monster to date – a mesh of leech flesh and plane circuitry – he waxes lyrical about stereotypical bad guy plans before finally biting the dust in a pool of lava.

It was also in this latest chapter that his origin story was revealed. Albert Wesker was the lone survivor of the Wesker Plan, a project to find Ozwell Spencer's protégé by kidnapping children, subjecting them to the Progenitor Virus and conditioning them through brainwashing. As manufactured as the beasts he helped create, his upbringing is horrifying but certainly fitting.

Producer Masachika Kawata insists that the blond badass has finally been laid to rest, but with the non-linear structure of the series spin-offs, there's little doubt he'll crop up again at some point. It seems that the planet is at last safe from his diabolical schemes – until the next *Resident Evil* movie, at least.

"AS MANUFACTURED AS THE BEASTS HE HELPED CREATE, WESKER'S UPBRINGING IS HORRIFYING BUT FITTING"



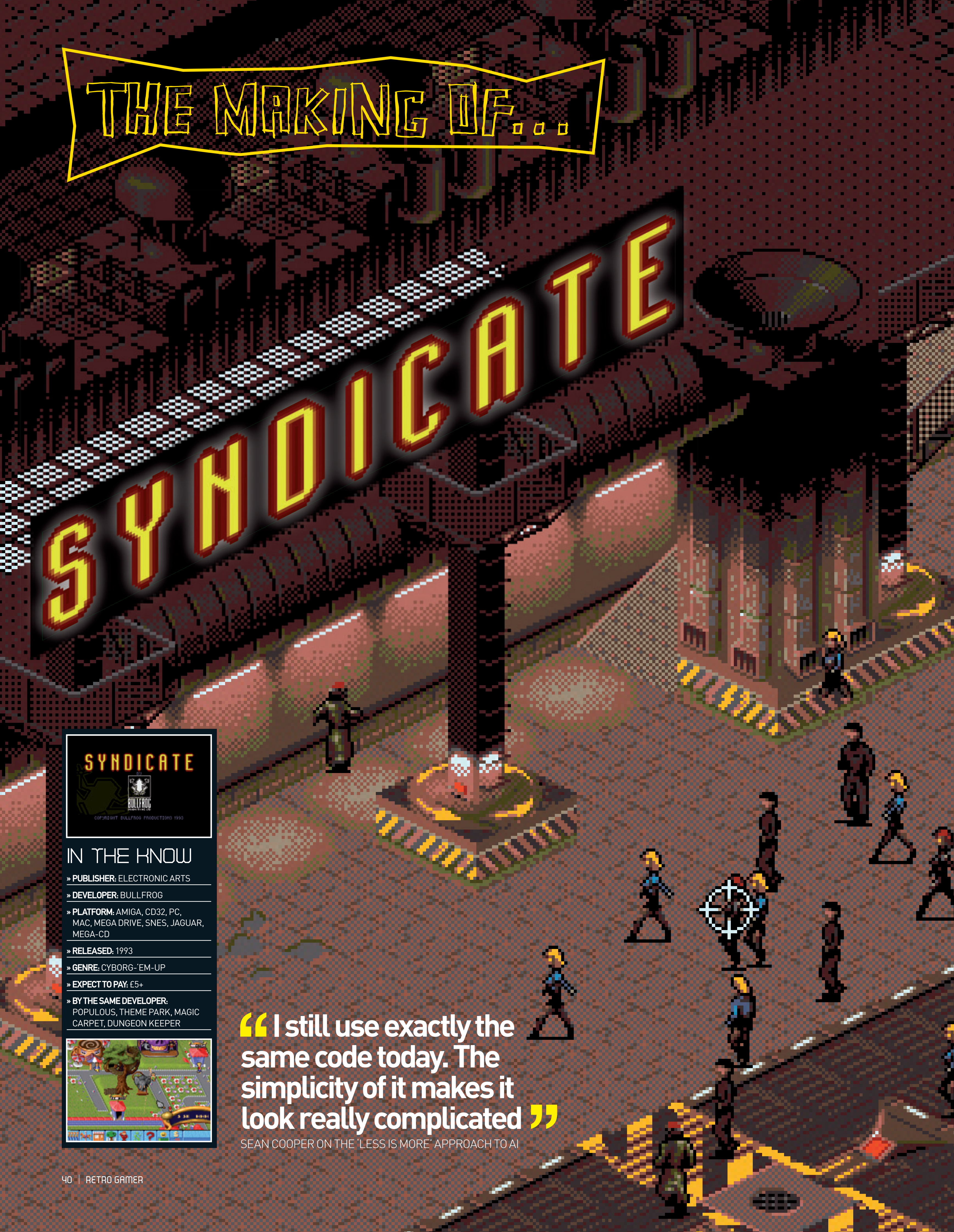
» [PlayStation] In the laughable live-action opening to the original game, Wesker looked like a slightly melted plastic doll.



» [GameCube] The remake of the original *Resident Evil* gave him a beefed up but more low-key appearance.



» [Dreamcast] Wesker dropped his perpetual shades for five minutes as he brawled with his nemesis Chris Redfield.



THE MAKING OF...

SYNDICATE

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** BULLFROG
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, CD32, PC, MAC, MEGA DRIVE, SNES, JAGUAR, MEGA-CD
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** CYBORG-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** POPULOUS, THEME PARK, MAGIC CARPET, DUNGEON KEEPER

"I still use exactly the same code today. The simplicity of it makes it look really complicated"

SEAN COOPER ON THE 'LESS IS MORE' APPROACH TO AI



Bullfrog's Syndicate offered players unprecedented levels of freedom for creating havoc with a squad of bionic cyborgs in an oppressive virtual futurescape. Mike Bevan caught up with lead designer Sean Cooper and 'persuaded' him to talk

The not-so-distant future. The world's governments have collapsed, and mega-corporations have replaced them as bastions of global power. Diplomacy has given way to high-tech ultra-violence as ruthless 'syndicates' vie for territory and resources, using heavily armed cyborg agents pumped to the eyeballs on neural-enhancing drugs. Welcome to the dawning of a new age…

Syndicate's setting may have had its roots in the cyberpunk literature of William Gibson, and, of course, a certain Ridley Scott movie involving replicants, but what was most impressive was the way it presented its atmospherically dystopian game-world. With 50 missions set across a series of isometric sandbox cities, somewhat evocative of Sandy White's classic *Ant Attack*, gamers had the freedom to play as they desired. Drive-by shootings on cops and innocent bystanders, wanton property destruction, and recruiting members of the populace then sending them blindly into firefights were some of the delights on offer. And all this 15 years before *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

The remarkable design ethic of *Syndicate* was the result of a collaboration between producer and Bullfrog founder Peter Molyneux, and an eight-strong team led by programmer Sean Cooper. Sean's route into the company was an unlikely one, stemming from a chance encounter with Acorn's finest. "I was in Cyprus, where my dad was in the Army, and this BBC [microcomputer] turned up in our maths class," he recalls. "And that was it… From then on I never really took my hands off a computer. My dad bought me a BBC Micro in 1983, and I started programming games at that point, for my mates at school."

"I left school at 16 and was working in some cable manufacturing company, putting cables together," he continues. "I had no idea what I wanted to do. Then this opportunity came up of a youth training scheme called the ITeC, which was based in Guildford. I went there in 1987. I knew a lot about programming, but what I was more interested in was getting a job through them. And then one day Peter Molyneux walked in and said, 'Give us your best guy.'"

Despite his luck in landing a gig at Bullfrog, Sean initially had doubts about where he fit in with the company. "Peter nurtured me a little bit," he admits. "I think at one point he wanted to fire me because I was so useless. I think because he didn't know how to manage someone who was so young, and I didn't really understand what work was about – going in and being responsible for my daily duties. And they were writing this game, *Flood*, but there was something else, a platform 'snake' game, and he said, 'Do you want to make something of this?'"



» "Working for Bullfrog was certainly the best time. I didn't really know what I was doing; I was just creating this game. We were so psyched about the game that it just didn't count as work."

Settling in, Sean was promoted to lead programmer and designer on *Flood*, while his mentor was diverted by the upcoming strategy title *Powermonger*. "I was also involved in *Populous* for testing and a little bit of programming," he remembers. "Glenn Corpes had been teaching me how to put pixels in Deluxe Paint, and we did the expansion pack for *Populous*. I think Peter went away on holiday and we did it within a week."

The idea behind *Syndicate* came soon after *Powermonger*'s completion. "We were all sitting in a pub and Peter asked me what I wanted to do next," says Sean. "I think he probably saw some potential in me. We discussed this idea of cyborgs, a *Blade Runner*-ish thing where you were this mighty corporation that built soldiers to take over governments. The way I look at it now is a bit like the film *Minority Report*. The syndicates were controllers of zones of the world where governments had been depleted, so these mega-corporations could do pretty much what they wanted."

Sean has a surprising admission given the assumed inspiration for

THE MAKING OF… SYNDICATE

Syndicate's overall look, with its hover cars, distinctive gun-metal architecture and prolific neon advertising hoardings. "I think most people were fans of *Blade Runner*," he says. "It was connected to our industry, that sort of feel, and we were all 20 years old. But I hadn't actually seen the film myself, and didn't really connect with it until afterwards. I think I was inspired more by comic books and films like *The Terminator* – that kind of mightiness in a person. I was more interested in being able to customise and modify a human being – to make him stronger and faster."

The approach of the team was to look first at how this futuristic world would be portrayed. A top-down view was considered before settling for the now-familiar isometric perspective.

"We could have gone down the route of *Zelda*, which is sort of isometric, but you don't have that twisted angle on it," explains Sean. "Glenn obviously knew a bit about rendering this sort of viewpoint from *Populous*, and he suggested doing it with a cell-based system: breaking the isometric blocks up into eight bits so we could apply compression and draw it very fast."

To test the interactivity of the newly created environments, the team set up a rudimentary multiplayer system for the proposed cyborg squads. "We started off on the Amiga, using the blitter and copper list to run the engine, then switched to the PC," says Sean. "We had an eight-player network system, and that's how I started: just putting some characters on screen and hooking up a couple of players. The AI came a lot later." As the scrolling city backgrounds began to take shape, the next big step was to simulate the population using dozens of computer-controlled characters – civilians, police and, later, squads of deadly enemy cyborg agents.

"Peter was really into that; that was his touch," says Sean. "If it was just an empty city with you walking around killing these other syndicates it wouldn't have been the game it was. His thoughts were something I was so interested in anyway, so it took very little time to convince me. Peter was never the kind of guy that said 'do this or that' – he just influenced you to do stuff. He was very clever in his way of making everyone feel comfortable about what they were doing."

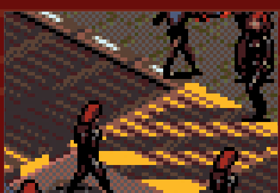
"Actually I really cheated it," chuckles Sean guiltily. "There were a couple of states for each character: 'wonder', or 'run away'. It was that simple really. The weapons had an effect range. If you ran around waving them about, the police would pick up on it as a threat, and the civilians would leg it. I still use exactly the same code today. The simplicity of it makes it look really complicated."

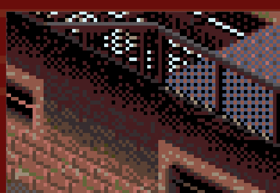
Another layer of immersion was created through the game's traffic system, with sleek hover cars roving independently around the map, stopping for pedestrians and traffic signals, and a futuristic monorail network spanning later areas. Although this feature appears seamless in the game, it wasn't as easy to implement as the civilian NPCs. "Vehicles went in really early," says Sean. "But we had loads of problems with driving them around the map. Before we really got into level design, we had the black tank that's in there, without the turret, just driving around, and, of course, you could just run people over. The game became really easy if you stayed in a vehicle, and the AI around that all of a sudden became very complicated and outside of my scope

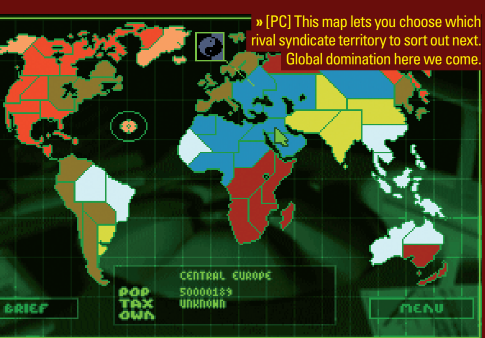
AMERICAN REVOLT

The *American Revolt* expansion shocked many players of the original due to its difficulty. Some of the levels make *Syndicate*'s Atlantic Accelerator look like a *Teletubbies* convention. Players are quickly deluged by a hail of gauss gun fire from insanely tough cyborg opponents, prompting all but the most masochistic to abandon hope of making it through all 21 missions. We couldn't help but ask if Sean was responsible.

"Yeah, unfortunately," he grimaces. "I did it all, actually, and Alex built all the levels. It was such a shame it was so hard. The trouble was I was such a high cloud at that point and I became complacent. It was like, 'Here's a sequel… We'll just knock something out quickly.' It wasn't an attitude for producing a commercial product that someone was going to pay for. We didn't put any real attention into that game. It was a case of 'Let's add air strikes and a few more weapons and get on with it. We'll be done in a month then we can move on to the new game.'"



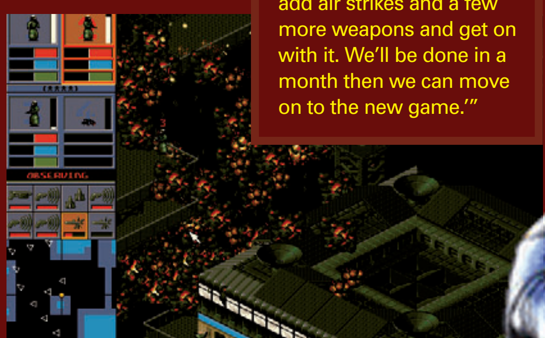


» [PC] This map lets you choose which rival syndicate territory to sort out next. Global domination here we come.



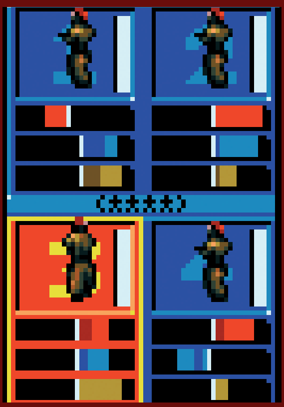
» [PC] Our plucky agents' gauss guns make short work of an enemy APC and most of the surrounding architecture. Yikes.





UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Alongside the game's controversial violence, another notable feature of *Syndicate* was the ability to control your team's reaction to imminent threats with the IPA (Intelligence-Perception-Adrenaline) system. By adjusting three sliders, players could administer a specific dose of drugs to their agents. Most players frequently resorted to 'panic mode', whereby clicking both mouse buttons sent their agents into perceptive overdrive, automatically gunning down incoming enemies, and speeding around the levels like Carl Lewis. At the time, the portrayal of controlled substances in a game was, to say the least, unusual. "I guess I didn't even really think about it," admits Sean. "I just wanted blood. I wanted drugs. Although I didn't do 'em, I thought it would be really cool if you injected these drugs into these guys to make them more alert, using a cocktail of different drugs to control them – making their speed faster, their thought paths better, their sight longer and the like."





» [PC] The team selection menu lets you customise your squad with body upgrades and equipment.



» [PC] The flamer weapon is devastating at close range, but beware: some enemy agents also pack it in their inventory.



» [Amiga] The first level in the game is a bit of a pushover, but don't get complacent. It gets a lot more difficult from here.



» [PC] *Syndicate* certainly doesn't wimp out regarding blood or body counts, and the results of your handiwork remain on screen as a reminder of your sociopathic tendencies.

"If you look at most games now, they're all mimicking that technique"

COOPER ON CHARACTER CUSTOMISATION



of knowledge, so we stopped that and restricted them to the roads."

RG asks if the team came up against any issues due to the complicated nature of the levels. "Not really," says Sean. "We used a very simple wall-hugging mechanism. This allowed for split levels, but it got screwed up a few times because you could only do so much to check which direction you should be going because of the processor power, so sometimes you'd go down a tunnel then come back out again…"

Speaking of control issues, *Syndicate* was criticised by some for the moments when your squad would disappear into a building, meaning movement was restricted to clicking on the mini-map. There would be gunfire, screaming, and people would run out on fire, but some players seemed to find this awkward. "I think a lot of people did," agrees Sean. "And I think when the player was pushed to do it and had to go into a room, that's when it became a problem. It was meant to be left as an option, so players that could handle it could use it, and players that couldn't didn't have to, but it didn't turn out that way because the nav system couldn't distinguish between them, so we had to leave it."

For many, *Syndicate*'s biggest draw alongside its level of freedom was the ability to customise your squad with new body parts and weapons, culminating in lasers, miniguns, flamethrowers and the supremely destructive gauss gun. "I think the whole research side, when you're researching the different weapons and body parts, and progressing your cyborgs, was a key part of the game," says Sean. "In fact, if you look at most games now, they're all mimicking that technique. Although we weren't the first, we took that idea to make *Syndicate* a game you could play in two ways: you play in the front end, you strategise, and then you play in this world. Even if there were loads of bugs in it – like the fact that you could leave it researching overnight and it would just do it!"

Sean worked with level designer Alex Trowers to create one of the game's best-remembered pieces of kit: a device that would allow players to herd NPCs around as sheep-like cannon fodder. "Alex was the key guy that worked very closely with me on the game," says Sean. "I'd say to him, 'Just come up with some more weapons.' We had this weapon that was like a staple gun, and that changed into the Persuadatron. We thought it would be really cool to collect this big gang of dudes and then have them causing havoc. They would pick up weapons, so you'd end up with 200 guns, and when you clicked the mouse button they'd all fire at the same time…"

As the interview draws to a close, Sean suggests we should mention a few other key members of the *Syndicate* team and reveals that he may not have been the easiest person to work with due to his singular vision of the game. He has particular praise for lead artist Paul McLaughlin: "Bullfrog had just hired him, and along with Michael Man they just produced something so brilliant, even given all my restrictions. I remember wanting animated billboards and they were like, 'How the hell are we going to do that?' But little touches like the lighting and the dirt around the borders of buildings… Those guys really brought the world to life. And people like sound designer Russell Shaw, and Chris Hill. Without them I don't think *Syndicate* would have been the game everyone reminisces about."

Syndicate's success spawned an expansion pack (*American Revolt*), and a sequel (*Syndicate Wars*), but it's the original that Sean still regards as its finest hour. "I'm very proud of the project, of that time in my life, and that I could do it in the first place," he says. "But I think the biggest thing was the customisation of the agents, and then the whole affecting system within the game of how things interact with each other. That's what I've always taken on from game to game, even the ones I'm doing now. It's all about these little worlds, what's interactive, what can the player be doing, where can he go… I concentrate on those things, because that to me is the gameplay – the challenges are irrelevant compared to having the player just enjoy [himself]. Which is what [*GTA*] does brilliantly: you don't have to be challenged because you can just enjoy the experience. And, for me, *Syndicate* is the same. The challenge is just something that we placed on top."

WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

CABAL



[Arcade] Here player one has a little rest while player two enjoys a good scratch. That, or both have just been shot.



[Arcade] One of the earlier bosses in the game. We want to know the strategic benefit of having a submarine there…



[Arcade] Join the army, they said. See the lush, tropical jungles of Vietnam, they said. Didn't say nuffink about getting shot at.

WHILE MANY CONSIDER THE VIETNAM WAR AN UNJUSTIFIED CONFLICT, IT WAS THE PERFECT SETTING FOR MANY A GAME. CRAIG RITCHIE DIVES HEADLONG INTO CABAL AND MAKES THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** TAD CORPORATION
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £150-£250

Cabal is quite an interesting beast indeed. In 1988 relative arcade unknown TAD Corporation takes a pretty basic formula, adds a few unique little tweaks here and there, throws it all together in a somewhat standard Vietnam-esque setting and ends up producing one of the most popular shooters of that year.

The premise and execution are somewhat simple: two daring commandos give camouflage the middle finger as they don their respective bight blue and red uniforms and then take on a horde of enemies over a number of single-screen battlefields. Each area has a pseudo-three-dimensional feel to it thanks to some perspective trickery, different sized sprites, and an environment that gives the impression of trailing off towards the horizon.

As is fitting, the action takes place from a third-person viewpoint with the players able to run left to right along a two-dimensional plane while moving a crosshair target around the screen. Incidentally, the first release of *Cabal* used a trackball to control player and crosshair movement, with the joystick version coming out not long thereafter.

One of *Cabal*'s main innovations originates from the fact that the commandos stand stationary while firing and aiming the crosshair, but have to stop shooting in order to run (or roll, for that matter) away from incoming fire, adding a unique element of strategy to proceedings. Too much time standing still firing or lobbing grenades and you leave yourself open to being trapped by bullets and bombs from all sides. But too much time running and rolling out of harm's way and you could find yourself overwhelmed by a screen full of enemies. These may be simple, unassuming gameplay elements, but they all contribute to making *Cabal* that little bit more complex… and really, really successful.

This success was hardly an accident, it seems, and we'd wager that TAD knew exactly what it was doing all along. This is evidenced both by *Cabal*'s popularity as well as the success of its next outing. The following year the firm took a bog-standard platformer base, added in some fantasy elements, unique power-ups and a memorable primate protagonist who went on to become another retro gaming favourite: Toki.

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE



DEATH SOUNDS
Cabal's dying soldiers utter the strangest sounds ever – something like vomiting, squealing sheep. It has to be heard to be believed.



DESTRUCTION BONUSES
Each screen is littered with Easter egg bonuses awarded when you destroy scenery – one of TAD's trademark innovations.



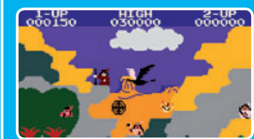
GRENADE SNIPING
Another cool element is that quick-fingered commandos can shoot grenades, bombs and bullets out of the skies long before they hit home.



WHAT GENEVA CONVENTION?
Instead of sticking with protocol, not to mention moral codes, players are rewarded for shooting medical staff. Repeatedly. For bonuses. Wow.

INFLUENCES

The games that influenced and have been influenced by **Cabal**



■ WANTED [ARCADE] 1984
Possibly the originator of the fixed screen death-by-crosshair genre, this shooter is more *Blood Brothers* than *Cabal*, but the essence is the same.



■ BLOOD BROTHERS [ARCADE] 1990
A true spiritual successor from the maker of *Cabal*, only this time set in the Wild West with a cowboy and Indian holding down the lead roles.





■ COMBAT SCHOOL [ARCADE] 1987
This genre-bender played like a cross between *Track & Field* and *Cabal*, with button-mashing run-and-jump sequences and target-practice screens.



■ NAM 1975 [NEO GEO] 1990
A blatant imitation of *Cabal* right down to the Vietnam War setting, this is a fluid and fun Neo Geo offering. Utterly unoriginal, but still brilliant.



■ OPERATION WOLF [ARCADE] 1987
This title sneaked in just a year before *Cabal*, and the similarities are very apparent – apart from *Operation Wolf*'s life-sized replica uzi, of course.



■ PIRATES [ARCADE] 1994
A strange outing with swashbucklers, witches, and player two assuming the role of a heroine in sexy boots and tight, purple underwear.

"TAD Corporation got it very, very right the first time round"

As was the case with *Toki*, *Cabal* stood out from the crowd not necessarily because it brought a whole lot new to the table, but rather because of the way it handled the basics. TAD clearly had a knack for fitting enough little extras and distinct features in to its arcade titles to leave gamers scrambling to bung in another 10 pence coin to keep the action going. Hidden bonus points and extra grenades, time-limited weapon upgrades and destructible environments all create a feeling that there are additional objectives to each stage over and above just killing enough opponents to fill the red bar at the bottom of the screen and progress on to the next area.

Cabal boasts a total of 20 screens, split between five stages with four areas each. These are followed by that staple of Eighties shooters: the boss. Taking the form of a giant military vehicle, these big meanies are much more troublesome when faced alone, because each time you die, their health returns to maximum. On the other hand, this does not happen in two-player mode, making these encounters considerably less troublesome when teaming up. It is uncertain, however, whether this magical health regeneration was an unintentional oversight, or a crafty design decision that acted as a money magnet for the coin slot, but whatever the case may be, it certainly made some of these battles incredibly frustrating when going it alone.

Despite the fact that it has such a unique playing style – and imitation titles were therefore be glaringly obvious – *Cabal* nevertheless saw a slew of similar games follow in its footsteps over the years. From official spiritual successor *Blood Brothers* and considerably more recent incarnation *Gamshara* to the blatant Neo Geo rip-off that was *NAM 1975*, most of these imitators seemed like little more than graphical overlays pasted on to near-identical engines. Some might argue that there's nothing wrong with this because, hey, why tamper with a winning formula, but we can't help feeling that something is amiss in the fact that in over 20 years no one has really taken the genre forward. Perhaps it's simply the case that TAD Corporation got it very, very right the first time round, and that, in itself, is reason enough for you to play *Cabal*.

THE CONVERSIONS

How the various versions compare



1 AMIGA

BEST VERSION

Even though it didn't always make the best use of colour, the Amiga version still sported great re-creations of the arcade graphics accompanied by solid, thumping sound effects and furiously paced action. If you can't track down the actual arcade version, this is the next best thing.



2 NES

Cabal received an extremely pleasing port on Nintendo's 8-bit wonder machine. Smooth movement and animation, plus some great pacing and plenty of sprites on screen all combine to produce a highly impressive and satisfying NES shooter.



3 COMMODORE 64

Despite bland and basic visuals, the C64 port handled well and sported a far more responsive crosshair than some other versions. While it didn't boast much in terms of sound, it was still a fast-paced conversion that did well to re-create the tense action of the arcade original.



4 ZX SPECTRUM

An ace conversion if a little easy, the Speccy outing enabled players to cut down swathes of unintelligent enemies all proceeding along the screen in predictable straight lines. Great use of colour and enjoyable gameplay despite some exploitable enemy movement patterns.

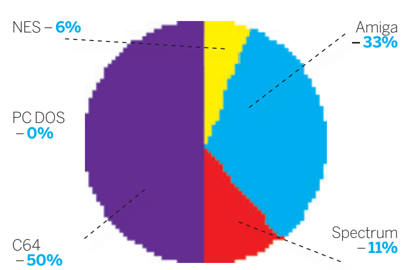


5 PC

WORST VERSION

While they may have got the basic formula right, the PCs of the late-Eighties just couldn't do their arcade counterparts any justice, and this port, with its slow-moving crosshair, blocky albeit colourful graphics and, well, shit sound is definitely the loser of the bunch.

FORUM OPINION



"The Amstrad version was very good too – it seems a little unfair that the Speccy version makes the poll and not the CPC one" **– batman877**

"The Commodore 64 version gets my vote. Playability alone is superb" **– thevulture**

NOMAD



SPECIFICATIONS

Year released: 1995

Original price: $180 (never released outside US)

Buy it now for: $60-$100 (depending on condition)

Associated magazines: Mean Machines Sega, Mega, Sega Pro, Sega Power, Sega Force, Sega Zone, Go! Handheld

Why the Nomad was great… The first true 16-bit handheld, the Nomad was as much a portable Mega Drive unit as it was a handheld games system and is the best official Mega Drive variant Sega ever released

"NOMAD: (MEMBER OF TRIBE) ROAMING FROM PLACE TO PLACE FOR PASTURE; WANDERING." WE COULDN'T THINK OF A MORE FITTING MONIKER FOR SEGA'S SECOND HANDHELD MACHINE. AS WELL AS BEING A PORTABLE GAMES MACHINE, SEGA'S FINAL ENTRY INTO THE HANDHELD MARKET WAS A MEMBER OF A BIG TRIBE OF UNSUCCESSFUL MEGA DRIVE VARIANTS. STUART HUNT DISCOVERS WHAT WENT WRONG FOR SEGA'S AMBITIOUS HANDHELD



We're not sure anyone from Nintendo has come out and said it yet, but Sega won that notorious 16-bit playground spat. If you were on the side of the blue hedgehog, well done, give yourself a pat on the back. What may serve as a shred of comfort to some disappointed SNES fans reading this, though, is that it was the only console war from which Sega emerged victorious during its time in the videogame hardware market. And while we really don't want to keep banging on about the tale of the Mega Drive – we've covered it in two features now – it is important to explain how significant the console was for Sega, to appreciate why it was so desperate to protract the machine's life for so long.

In brief, the Mega Drive was the machine that turned the tide for Sega by helping it to overtake the then seemingly infallible Nintendo. It was also the first machine to make the industry wake up to the fact that it is in the West that the battle for videogame supremacy is either won or lost. With a successful machine firmly bunkered down inside millions of homes around North America, Sega soon realised that its 16-bit machine would give it the edge in the next console war. With this in mind, Sega thought it would be better to keep the Mega Drive alive with various life-support monstrosities rather than support the Mega Drive in a soft capacity and concentrate efforts on a new machine. But with every disastrous misstep and commercial flop that Sega pushed tentatively out on to an eager and passionate market, customer confidence dropped and its reputation never recovered.

To put Sega's obsession with the Mega Drive into perspective, before releasing the Nomad, the developer had already released a quite astonishing seven separate variants and add-ons for the Mega Drive: three versions of the unit itself (the last variant, the Genesis 3, is native to North America only); two add-ons in the form of Mega CD and 32X; the Multi-Mega; and finally the Mega Jet, a screenless portable Mega Drive unit developed by Sega for in-flight entertainment on Japanese airlines. There were also three official 'clone' machines by other manufacturers saturating the market place even further: the Pioneer LaserVision variant, which cost a staggering $970 and was one of the most expensive pieces of Sega hardware to ever find a release; the quirky Aiwa Mega CD portable stereo; and finally the Wonder Mega, which was also manufactured by Pioneer.

INSTANT EXPERT

The Nomad was Sega's third handheld after the Game Gear and Mega Jet.

Launched in North America in October 1995, the Nomad retailed for $180. It had a library of over 500 Genesis games from launch and never found a release in either Japan or Europe.

The Nomad was the first true videogame handheld/TV-based console to find a release.

The machine is compatible with a surprising number of Mega Drive/Genesis peripherals but wasn't compatible with either the Mega CD or the 32X.

The Nomad was the spiritual successor to the Sega Mega Jet, a handheld hired out for in-flight entertainment on Japanese airlines.

Like the PC-Engine GT, the Nomad is one of the very few games machines to never receive an exclusive game.

Originally codenamed Project Venus, the machine was then re-christened the Nomad (with hindsight, a far more befitting moniker).

While the Nomad is one of the lesser-known consoles to come charging from the Sega stable, it is still an important and ambitious bookend to its 16-bit legacy, and serves as a memorable last stand for Mega Drive's commercial life. Had the Nomad been the first in that long line of abject Mega Drive failures by Sega – for reasons we'll touch on later – it's conceivable that the Nomad may well have been a far greater success than it was. For one, it would have certainly seen Sega repeat history by releasing a dramatically more powerful machine to market (this time in a handheld capacity) quicker than Nintendo. Also, some of the issues that haunted the Nomad in its short life may not have even existed.

Like the Game Gear, the Nomad was essentially a compact version of a larger TV-based machine. Although based on the technology of Sega's 8-bit Master System, the Game Gear is actually the more powerful console, boasting a far greater colour pallet – it can display over four thousand colours as apposed to the Master System's paltry 64. And like the Mega Jet, the Nomad was based on the technology inside the Mega Drive.

In terms of specs and performance, the Nomad is practically identical to its 16-bit TV-based cousin. Running from the same Motorola MC68000 CPU, and equalling the machine in memory, graphics and sound output, the Nomad was the most powerful handheld of its time. Its only real competition at the time of its release were the Atari Lynx and PC-Engine GT, both essentially 8-bit machines that housed two co-processors to bump up the quality of their graphics and sound.

Unlike the Game Gear, however, Sega's decision to base the Nomad around the guts of a TV-based console wasn't down to time restraints and a race to get the machine to market, but rather to capitalise on the strong install base the Genesis had garnered in North America by tempting Americans with Genesis game collections to part with more money. What is particularly notable about the Nomad is that it is the only handheld/TV-based console hybrid to find a release, because while NEC's PC-Engine GT played Hu Cards, unlike the Nomad, it couldn't be hooked up to a television.

The gestation of the Nomad can be traced right back to Sega's first foray into 16-bit portable gaming: the Sega Mega Jet. Licensed out by Sega for use on Japanese airlines, the Mega Jet took the shape of an elongated six-button Mega Drive controller but with its own cartridge slot in the top. To play games, the Jet was plugged into small armrest monitors on aeroplanes, and passengers could either play their own games or select one of the four Sega titles packed into the unit. That the device relied on a mains adaptor and a television meant that, other than for the unique job it was designed to do, in a portability sense the Jet was bit of an oddity. Nonetheless, in 1994 Sega released small quantities of the machine into Japanese department stores, and, predictably, like the Mega

NOMAD

> “The Nomad is highly sought after among retro collectors, particularly in Europe”

Drive, the machine struggled to find appeal in the East.

However, what really made the Nomad stand apart from all those other Mega Drive variants is that it was a completely self-sufficient games machine, and therefore fully portable. The Nomad not only featured its own 3.25-inch backlit colour screen, but also included an A/V output that allowed it to be hooked up to a television using the same scart or RF lead that came bundled with the Genesis 2, and through RGB leads could display a fantastic picture. And Sega marketed it as such. The box carefully uses the term ‘portable 16-bit game system’ on its packaging to explain what it was and to try to differentiate it from other handhelds that were currently on the market. In terms of design, its look was lifted from Sega’s first handheld: the Game Gear. It kept the dark, edgier look of its portable forerunner and comfortable concave D-pad, but boasted six buttons to accommodate the later Mega Drive releases. Of course, the console also benefited from a vast library of over 500 titles waiting on the shelves from launch. Yet despite such promise, the machine wasn’t without its issues.

When the console was released, Sega had already unleashed two very costly add-ons for the Genesis. In 1992 they released the Mega CD in the US, which retailed for an astonishing $300, and two years later it unleashed the 32X on the world, which came at an additional $170. While the unit retailed for almost half the price of the PC-Engine GT ($299), coming so late in the Mega Drive’s commercial life, and having already asked customers to fork out more than double the cost of the Genesis to pledge their support to Sega, the asking price of the Nomad, of course, seemed relatively steep to consumers. Furthermore, while the Nomad was compatible with a surprising number of Mega Drive peripherals – including the Mega Mouse, six-button joypads, arcade sticks, the Team Play Adaptor, the Sega Activator, Sega Channel and the Xband modem cart to offer portable internet access – Sega failed to make the machine backwards compatible with either the Power Base Convertor, Mega CD or 32X add-on.

This meant that devoted Sega fans could only play Genesis carts on the machine while the 32X and Mega CD games they had more recently shelled out for were left out in the cold. Moreover, this would have undoubtedly sent mixed messages to the consumer about the future of both the Mega CD and 32X, which were already struggling in the marketplace at that time. And the problems didn’t end there. Like the GT, the Nomad’s hi-res coloured LCD back-lit displays were notorious for blurring when displaying fast-moving games, and because of its small screen, games with generally small sprites or tiny text, were often difficult to play. While the Nomad’s high-resolution screen did allow Mega Drive games to look better than ever, in games like shmups, where the action scrolls quickly, the screen was prone to blur and lose definition. The screen was also one of the biggest factors behind the handheld’s meagre battery life, which



The Game Genie Trick

Apparently, one way to solve the issue of some early third-party Mega Drive games not working on the Nomad is to use the ‘Game Genie Trick’. It basically requires you to plug the problem cartridge into a Game Gear while it’s in the ‘off’ position. The Game Gear is said to lend the cart its own checksum, bypassing the regular one inside the cartridge that the system doesn’t like all that much. Admittedly, we’ve not tried this ourselves, so we can’t be 100 per cent sure this method works. In principle, though, it sounds like a reasonable way to overcome the checksum issue said to be at the root of the problem.



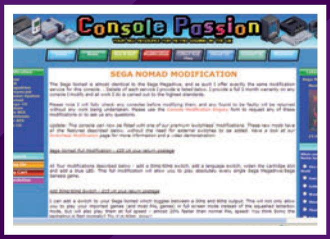




» [Mega Drive] *Comix Zone* was used to promote the Nomad and released around the same time.

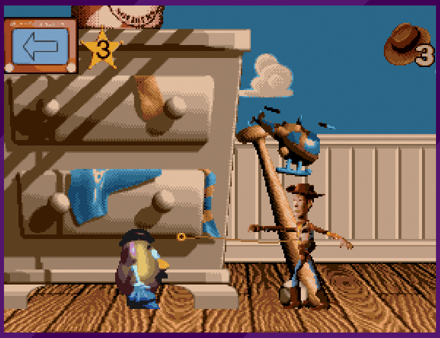
State Of Play

Generally, importing games for handhelds requires far less hair-pulling than it does for TV-based consoles. Most handhelds are multi-region and require no hacking to play games from any territory. The Nomad, however, is one of the few handhelds, along with the NEC PC-Engine GT, to include region lockout. As the Nomad is essentially a portable version of a larger home console, all security measures are passed down to the machine, likely why it's known to struggle when playing some third-party software. As a result, out of the box, the Nomad will only play Genesis carts. However, it is possible to mod the machine and skirt the problem. Console Passion offers a full modification job for just £25 and that price includes a 50Hz/60Hz toggle and language switches to boot. So if you're desperate to play classics like *Yu Yu Hakusho* on the go, visit **www.consolepassion.co.uk** for more details.



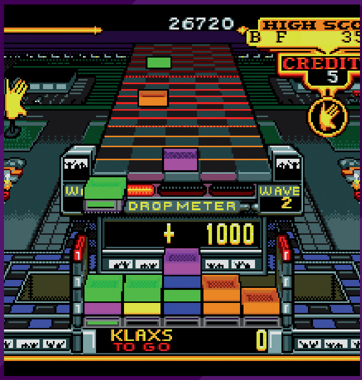


» The appearance of the Nomad was clearly influenced by the Game Gear.



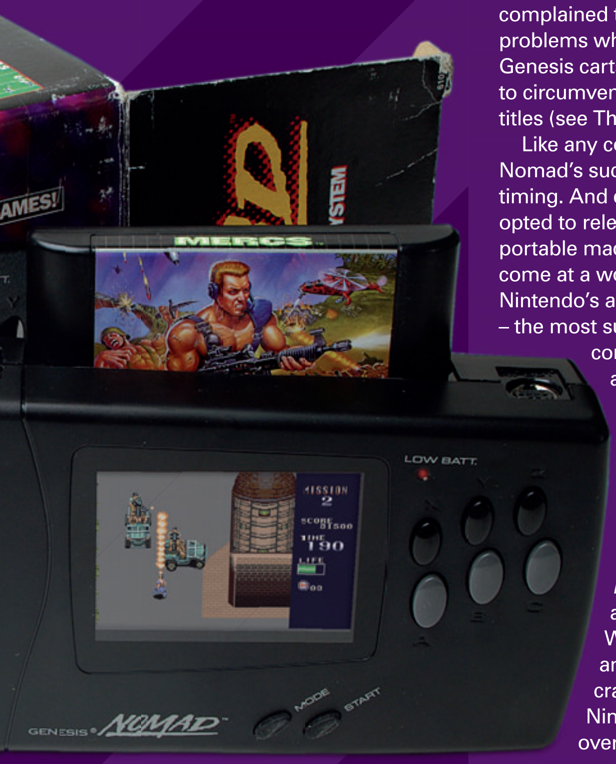


» The Aiwa Mega CD/CD Player, one of the most bizarre Mega Drive variants there is.





» [Mega Drive] Say what you like about the Nomad, it's the only legal way to play *SOR2* on a plane.



offered just three to four hours of juice from AA batteries. And while a rechargeable battery pack and A/C adaptor was made available for the unit, its paltry four hours was clearly a contributing factor to the mounting problems that were diminishing the Nomad's appeal. Customers also complained that they experienced problems when trying to run early Genesis carts, although there is a way to circumvent the problem in some titles (see The Game Genie Trick).

Like any console release, the Nomad's success relied heavily on timing. And cruelly, the time Sega opted to release its sophomore portable machine could not have come at a worse time. In 1995, Nintendo's all-conquering Game Boy – the most successful videogame console of all time – was about to receive a game that would re-ignite interest in the then eight-year-old handheld. Working with fellow videogame developer Game Freak, Nintendo released *Pocket Monsters* (or *Pokémon* as it is known in the West) on the machine and unleashed a global craze that further enforced Nintendo's vice-like grip over the handheld market.

Furthermore, it was in this year that the Sega president at the time, Hayao Nakayama, announced that his company would be ceasing support for the Mega Drive/Genesis. The company was turning its efforts to its new 32-bit console, the Sega Saturn, which had already been released in North America that summer, a few months before the launch of the Nomad. This was a gross misjudgement on Nakayama's part. It's believed that Sega's decision to drop the 16-bit market outright, thus handing it over to Nintendo, cost the company millions of dollars. Not only had they further enraged customers, but also, in dropping the Mega Drive so soon after releasing yet another newfangled variant of the machine to market, Sega had also handed its rival two years' worth of trade inside a market that it could now monopolise. And Nintendo responded duly with late Super Nintendo releases including *Donkey Kong Country 3*, *Doom* and *Harvest Moon* in the US, plus a slew of other titles launched in the US between 1996 and 1997. This, coupled with Sony throwing its hat into the videogame hardware ring with Sony's PlayStation in September 1995, was the final nail in the coffin for the Nomad in the US. It had seen one of the quickest demises of any high-profile videogame handheld in history, and by 1999, stores of Toys 'R Us were trying to shift stocks of the console for as little as $50.

Owing to its low numbers, US isolation, and short commercial existence, today the Nomad is highly sought after among retro collectors, and particularly by enthusiasts in Europe. With prices fetching between £90 to £150, depending on condition, the Nomad has increased in value, and with a library brimming with games, it's still very much a handheld oozing longevity.

Had Sega cottoned on to the concept of the Nomad before the Mega Drive 2, and rolled it out as a true successor to the Mega Drive – marketed it as the portable console/handheld hybrid it was – then perhaps Sega may have succeeded in its original goal to prolong the life of the Mega Drive in the US. After all, the portable benefits of the Nomad would likely have been a popular selling point for the type of gamer among which the Genesis was popular. Sega had marketed the Genesis at teenage and more adult gamers, so releasing a games console that students and teenagers could easily throw in bag and ferry to friends' homes would have undoubtedly been an attracting prospect. It's ironic, then, that Sega's last hurrah in its bid to prolong the life of the Mega Drive could well have been its best.



NOMAD PERFECT TEN



01

DR ROBOTNIK'S MEAN BEAN MACHINE

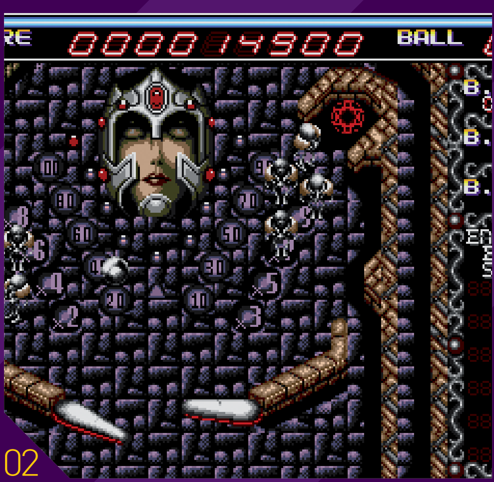
» **RELEASE:** 1993
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **CREATOR:** COMPILE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ALESTE

01 **If you're looking** for an excellent puzzle game to play on your Nomad, then look no further. Based on the *Sonic* cartoon, *Mean Bean Machine* was a *Puyo Puyo*-style puzzle game by *Puyo Puyo* creator Compile. Players battle against Robotnik's cronies in a race to match coloured jellybeans as they cascade down the screen. The game features 13 stages and a handy password system, so it's perfect for dipping in and out. Its colourful graphics and single-screen action make it great for the Nomad's display. Incidentally, there's a pretty decent version available for Game Gear.

DEVIL CRASH

» **RELEASE:** 1991
» **PUBLISHER:** TECHNO SOFT
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THUNDER FORCE III

02 **We reckon that** *Devil Crash*'s Gothic pinball action is perfect for the Nomad. With simple controls (the left flipper is controlled using any button on the D-pad while the right flipper moves using a face button), take-it-in-turns two-player multiplayer, and big chunky graphics – not to mention addictive gameplay perfectly suited to short bursts – it ticks all the boxes. While Techno Soft's classic may only have one table to play on, there is still plenty of game to discover, with the main table leading you into six hidden bonus mini-tables and all sorts of freakish targets to smash. It's a must own for any Nomad collection.



02

STORY OF THOR

» **RELEASE:** 1994
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **CREATOR:** ANCIENT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ROBOTREK

03 **The Nomad often** struggles to display small text crisply, and games with tiny words tend to be adventure games. One RPG that doesn't fall into this bracket is *Story Of Thor*, one of the latest Mega Drive RPGs. Like *Zelda*, the hero, Prince Ali, uses the powers of four good spirits to save his kingdom from an evil ne'er-do-well. With chunky visuals, fantastic music by Sega music maestro Yuzo Kushiro and compelling gameplay, this is a classic addition to any Sega collection. While this still features a fair amount of blur, it's never anything more than a niggle.

RANGER X

» **RELEASE:** 1993
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **CREATOR:** GAU ENTERTAINMENT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RESIDENT EVIL CODE: VERONICA

04 **The first and** last game by Gau Entertainment, before the studio was folded into another, *Ranger X* remains one of the best looking Mega Drive titles ever. Essentially just *Cybernator* meets *Silkworm*, in *Ranger X* you pilot the eponymous assault suit, which is accompanied by a motorbike, and which the player can move independently. Hard as Charles Bronson, and just as colourful, *Ranger X* was an underplayed MD shoot-'em-up classic that, owing to its chunky visuals, works brilliantly on the Nomad's tiny screen.

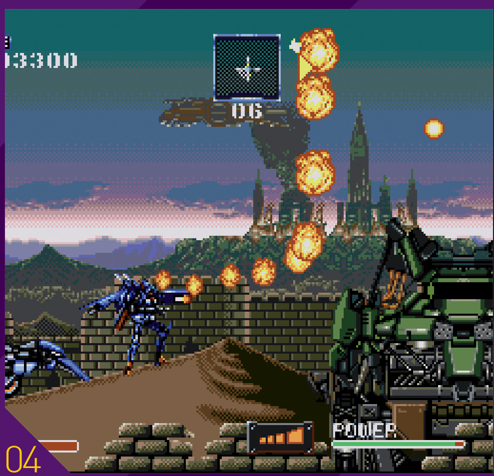
CASTLE OF ILLUSION STARRING MICKEY MOUSE

» **RELEASE:** 1990
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

05 **From its captivating** opening to its lavish cartoon visuals, inventive level design, and pick-up-and-play gameplay, *Castle Of Illusion* is a quality Mega Drive platformer that makes the transition to Nomad brilliantly. Criticised for its sedate pace compared with other classic platformers (notably those starring a certain blue hedgehog), *Castle Of Illusion* is actually more Nomad-friendly, as less blurring and colour smudging occurs during the action bits.



03



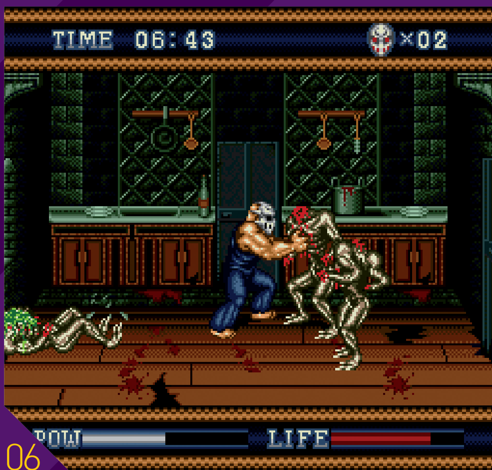
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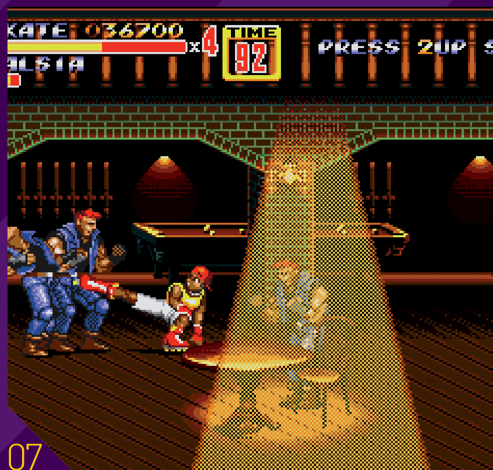
05

GAMES

Taking into account Nomad's small screen and those blurring issues, we recommend the very best titles to pick up for the handheld. Just make sure you have a converter for playing games from different regions



06



07



08

SPLATTERHOUSE 3

- **RELEASE:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- **CREATOR:** NAMCO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TIME CRISIS

06 **Until the release** of *Splatterhouse 3*, the series was just a gory grindhouse version of Irem's *Kung Fu Master*: its hero Rick ploughing his way through scores of mutant freaks instead of guys in pyjamas to reach his love, Jennifer. For *Splatterhouse 3*, Namco tweaked the formula. Rather than work your way from one side of the screen to the other, Rick battles through mazes of rooms, looking for a doorway that will lead him to the next bit of the game. With simple gameplay and giant sprites, *Splatterhouse* lent itself brilliantly to the Nomad.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

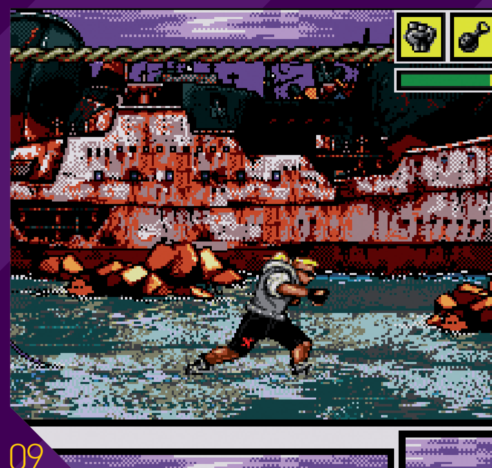
- **RELEASE:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATOR:** SEGA
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINOBI

07 **Cited by many** as Mega Drive's greatest brawler, *Streets Of Rage 2* was a magnificent sequel and Sega's answer to Capcom's arcade smash *Final Fight*, which Nintendo had secured the rights to for SNES. Sega won hands down. Pumping the original *SOR* graphics full of performance-enhancing steroids, adding characters, moves, levels, bosses, and more of that excellent Yuzo Koshiro music, it remains the ultimate side-scrolling brawler for the Nomad and just so happens to be one of the finest sequels in videogaming history.

TOY STORY

- **RELEASE:** 1996
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATOR:** TRAVELLERS TALES
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC 3D

08 **Appearing late in** the Mega Drive's life (1996), *Toy Story* was one of the machine's best-looking platformers. Utilising a similar 3D graphical technique to Rare's *Donkey Kong County* to give character sprites a real pop, the game looked superb. With a variety of levels based on key scenes from the film, including a neat *Wolfenstein* FPS section set inside a grabbing machine, and a nifty racing level that was exclusive to the Mega Drive conversion. Owing to its beefy visuals and charm, *Toy Story* is a handheld gem you'll want to replay again and again.



09

COMIX ZONE

- **RELEASE:** 1995
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE II

09 **Released around the** same time as the Nomad and used to demo the machines on its packaging, *Comix Zone* was perfectly matched to Sega's handheld. A side-scrolling beat-'em-up set within the panels of a comic book, enemies would be drawn in front of your very eyes and the action played out against a fantastic rock soundtrack. What *Comix Zone* lacked in longevity – it only had three stages, two levels deep – it more than made up for in ambition and presentation. Sadly, like the Nomad, the game came to life a little too late for Sega to really capitalise on its quality. So it's a fitting game to be playing on a Nomad.

STREET FIGHTER II: SPECIAL CHAMPION EDITION

- **RELEASE:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATOR:** CAPCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MERCS

10 **Looking for a** one-on-one fighter to enjoy while out on the road? Then grab a copy of *Street Fighter II Champion Edition*. The Nomad's six buttons and concave D-pad are perfect for frantic sessions on *Street Fighter II*. The only problem is that to play against friends you'll need to connect your machine to a TV as fighting over the small display isn't that enjoyable. Outshined by *Street Fighter II Turbo*, the Genesis port had a few aces up its sleeve: it included the arcade attract screen, a team-battle mode and 11 speed settings.



10

SEGA NOMAD and the rest…

Sega's machine may have had no Nomad-specific titles, but with over 500 compatible Mega Drive games, there was still plenty to choose from

01 ALADDIN
02 SPACE HARRIER II
03 THE IMMORTAL
04 PAC-MANIA
05 CASTLE OF ILLUSION
06 STREETS OF RAGE 2
07 CALIFORNIA GAMES
08 TRUXTON
09 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
10 GOLDEN AXE
11 WARDNER
12 ECCO THE DOLPHIN
13 QUACKSHOT
14 STRIDER
15 COLUMNS
16 ALIEN 3
17 GHOULS 'N GHOSTS
18 MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER
19 ROLLING THUNDER
20 KLAX
21 EARTHWORM JIM
22 FLASHBACK
23 BUBSY THE BOBCAT
24 RISTAR
25 THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN
26 TOEJAM & EARL
27 DR ROBOTNIK'S MEAN BEAN MACHINE
28 LAST BATTLE
29 DJ BOY
30 ALTERED BEAST
31 MERCS
32 STREET FIGHTER II: SPECIAL CHAMPION EDITION
33 FANTASIA
34 PHANTASY STAR II
35 WONDER BOY III
36 SOLEIL
37 MORTAL KOMBAT II
38 FANTASTIC DIZZY
39 ALIEN SOLDIER
40 CASTLEVANIA BLOODLINES
41 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
42 TOY STORY
43 BUDOKAN
44 RAMBO 3
45 ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS
46 JUNGLE BOOK
47 DEVIL CRASH
48 HELLFIRE
49 POPULOUS
50 CHUCK ROCK
51 GUNSTAR HEROES
52 ROAD RASH
53 COOL SPOT
54 COMIX ZONE
55 RAINBOW ISLANDS
56 JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL





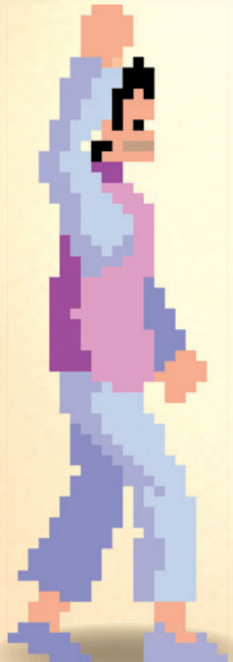
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KUNG-FU MASTER

Going under the name of *Spartan X* in Japan, and originally based on a Jackie Chan film of the same name – meaning that it could, in fact, be one of the earliest examples of a movie conversion, we're guessing – Irem's *Kung-Fu Master* may not have been the first side-scrolling brawler to ever find a release – that honour goes to Taito's *Rolling Fighter*, a possible weird precursor to *DJ Boy* – but it was certainly the first that many people remember with a real fondness. Join us as we boot up the grandmaster of girlfriend reclamation games and try our best not to get smothered by some jerks dressed like Parma Violets.

PYJAMAED GOONS

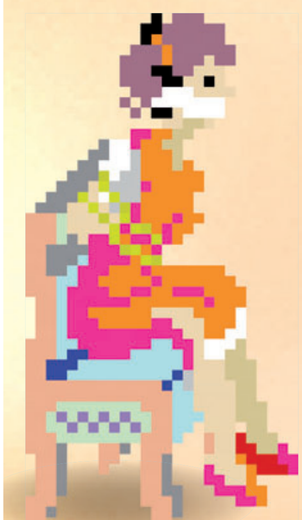
Cropping up on every stage, these lilac henchmen are the most common enemy that Thomas faces in the game. While large in numbers, thankfully they're awesomely weedy and don't put up much of a fight. Running at Thomas with their arms in the air, a well-timed kick or punch is all it takes to put these idiots down.



THOMAS

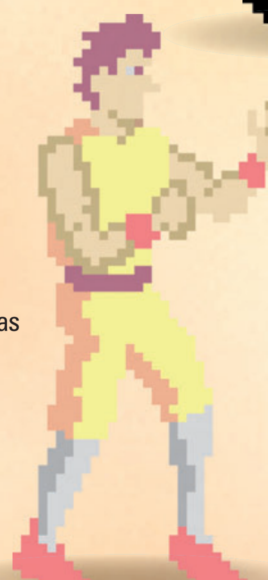
Thomas is our hero and is said to be based on a character that Jackie Chan played in the movie *Spartan X*. He's out to stop an evil gang who have kidnapped his girlfriend and tied her to a chair. Thomas might be tough, but he moves like he's learning how to walk in women's shoes.





SILVIA

Silvia, Thomas's girlfriend, plays the role of hapless kidnap victim. Between some rounds she will spout words of encouragement to Thomas – presumably through some kind of telepathy. The game never actually clarifies why the gang has kidnapped Silvia, so perhaps watching that movie will shed some light on the matter.

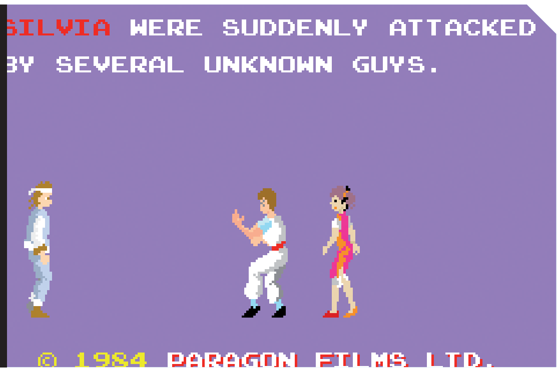


X

The final boss, X, is a really tricky opponent to stop, largely as his block is a pain to break. The trick is to try quick combinations of low, medium and high attacks while praying that one of them actually makes some kind of connection. Do this five times and the girl is yours again.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's simple, really

It was the simplicity of *Kung-Fu Master* that made it a joy to play. The chunky pastel graphics, easy to grasp narrative and simple two-button attack system, comprising of four attacks – sweep kick, punch, kick and high kick – made it easy for anyone to pick up. Despite its obvious accessibility, the gameplay was typically Irem. Chucking hordes of enemies at the screen, including henchmen, butterflies and even dragons, the game was no stroll in the park. In fact, it would be fair to say you need to actually have the reflexes of a kung-fu master to see anything dwelling past the second stage.

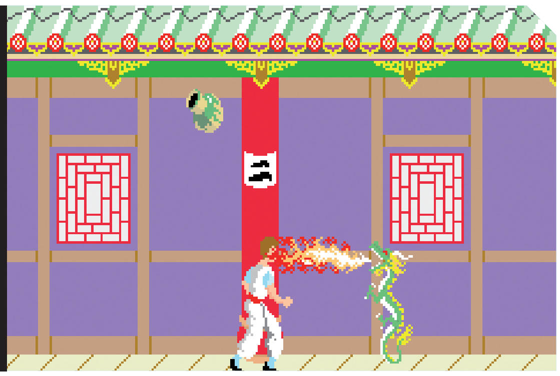
STANDOUT MOMENT



End credits

Having battled his way to the top of the Devil's Temple and thwarted all five of the game's bosses, Thomas finally claims his prize. In the final scene Silvia dashes towards our hero and the pair share a tender kiss and cuddle, surrounded by love hearts. Unfortunately, this touching embrace is short-lived. Remember, folks, this is early arcade game universe here, where happy ending slates are wiped clean until your wallet no longer proves a useful possession. Yep, Irem forced us to repeat the whole mission again, but this time with the difficulty bumped up a notch.

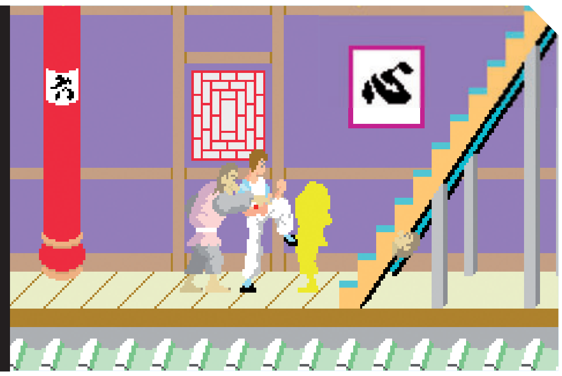
BEST STAGE



Driven potty

As the game is set inside a multistorey dojo made up of five colours, most of the stages in *Kung-Fu Master* look pretty much identical. However, Irem mixed things up by throwing new enemies into the game with each new stage. If we had to pick a favourite 'floor' of the five in the game then the second would have to get our vote. This particular level starts off by dropping earthenware pots filled with snakes, darts and fire-breathing dragons at you and then breaks the *It's A Knockout*-style shenanigans with more lilac goons, who are this time joined by their annoying feral-looking children.

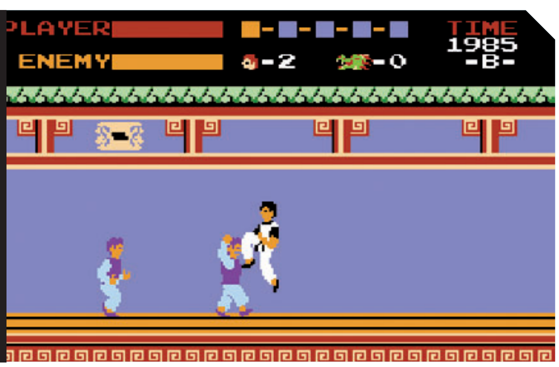
BEST BOSS



Humpty numpty

The penultimate boss on stage four is a guy who looks like Quasimodo. Don't let his short, stubby, gangly look and bad hair have you thinking he's going to be a walkover, though. This guy has some freaky magic up his sleeve. Punch him in the head and it falls off like a coconut balancing on the tip of a golf club, but then, like a Hydra, he quickly grows another. You can probably spend your entire life trying to hurt him this way – you can't actually, because there's a time limit – but it's pointless. The only way to get the job done is to punch him in the gut until his heart blows up.

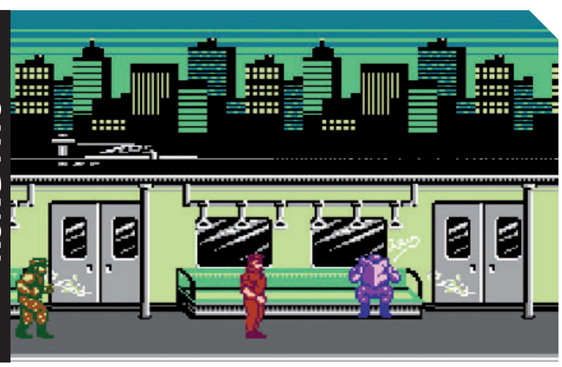
BEST PORT



Ninten-do

Of all the many home conversions of *Kung-Fu Master* that found release on various machines, the NES turns out the best, in our honest opinion. It boasts a wonderfully authentic-feeling version of the arcade game, from the excellent martial arts sound effects and faithful rendition of the arcade music to the wonderfully chunky, arcadey graphics. As well as boasting great looks and sounds, the controls also work brilliantly with the two-button NES pad, and the game features four different play modes: easy and difficult mode for either one or two players.

KUNG-TWO



The lost sequel

As it was never released outside Japan, not many people are aware that *Kung-Fu Master* received a sequel. Released exclusively for the Famicom, *Spartan X 2* kept the same side-scrolling gameplay and top, middle and bottom attacks as the original game. The story this time found our hero – now a different chap called Johnny – fighting through six levels to stop a drug deal. Aesthetically, *Spartan X 2* is quite a bit different to the first game, and there's also far more variety in the levels: one finds you fighting inside a train while another is set inside a plane carrying circus animals. It's pretty weird.

What the press said… ages ago



Crash
"The arcade game is nothing mega-amazing by today's standards, but it is playable and very addictive."

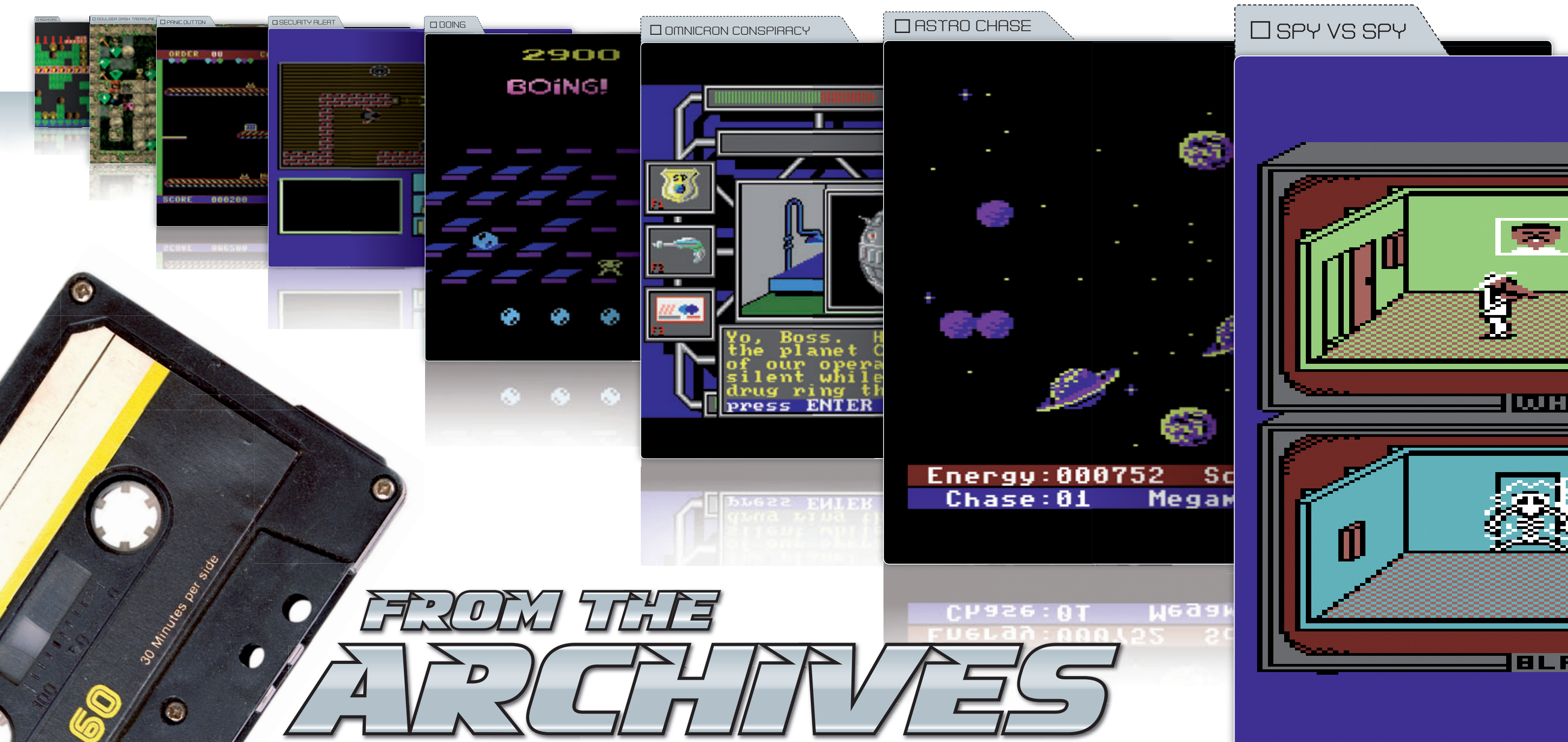
What we think

Well, we'll be the first to admit that *Kung-Fu Master* was quickly outmoded by many other arcade games in its day, but there's no denying its classic status. And it still remains incredibly playable, even today.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **DEVELOPER:** IREM
- **PUBLISHER:** DATA EAST
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** SIDE-SCROLLING FIGHTER
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** APPROX £150-300



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

First Star Software

Despite bringing Boulder Dash and Spy vs Spy to the world, First Star Software was almost extinguished in the early Nineties. Today, it's muscling its way back in, as Craig Grannell discovers

Two independent film producers running a fledgling videogames company have just turned down a quarter of a million dollars. This, perhaps surprisingly, will prove in the long run to be a shrewd financial decision, and not, as it might seem on the face of it, crazy. 1982 is turning out to be quite a year for Richard Spitalny and Billy Blake.

Just a few months earlier, Billy discovered the manager of a computer retail store he co-owned was something of a genius. Fernando Herrera had won a $25,000 prize from Atari for *My First Alphabet*, created to test his two-year-old son's vision after major cataract surgery. The prize's name? The Star Award. Something clicked; Richard and Billy, tired of lengthy movie production cycles and being at the mercy of studios, realised that in six months they could potentially go from a game concept to selling it to consumers – and there were more distribution and production channels for videogames than movies.

Inspired by Fernando's award, the new company was named First Star Software (FSS hereafter). Richard and Billy subsequently, in Richard's words, "left Fernando to do whatever he felt like doing, while Billy and I provided him with the equipment he needed and a salary". The first game Fernando devised was *Astro Chase*, where you pilot a ship around a cordoned-off section of space that's littered with planets, blow up alien craft and try to stop deadly mines from reaching Earth. Although basic and somewhat frustrating to play today, Richard says it caught the eye of the largest single investor in Commodore: "He loved it, and we were immediately offered $25,000 for the C64 rights. Since we were funding FSS and hadn't released the game, I said I needed to go back, speak to Fernando and think about it." Told it was a 'take it or leave it' offer, Richard decided to leave it, and as he headed towards the elevators, the offer suddenly multiplied by ten, which is roughly where we came in.

After protracted negotiations, FSS decided against the deal. *Astro Chase* was self-published and sold 40,000 units, with specific rights sold on to Parker Brothers for $250,000. For the tiny newcomer publisher, this was a major turning point, because it meant Richard and Billy were no longer funding FSS out of their own pockets.

During the following year, FSS began cranking out products for various platforms. *Panic Button*, a game where you assemble products on a multi-level manufacturing line, was designed as a test for a young programmer. Richard recalls: "He'd moved to the USA and was still in school. I gave him the idea for the game, which is based on an *I Love Lucy* routine where Lucy and Ethel are trying to keep up with chocolate candies on a conveyer belt. Since the programmer had a TRS-80 at the time, the game was only initially released for that platform."

Next, the *Q*bert*-like *BOiNG!* became FSS's sole Atari 2600 release. "It was created by a husband and wife team, and

INSTANT EXPERT

Prior to founding First Star Software, Richard Spitalny and Billy Blake were independent film producers. They liked the idea of working in the games industry because they'd no longer be at the mercy of major film studios.

The first game created by the company was *Astro Chase*, and the last game it created under a traditional development model was *Astro Chase 3D*, over a decade later.

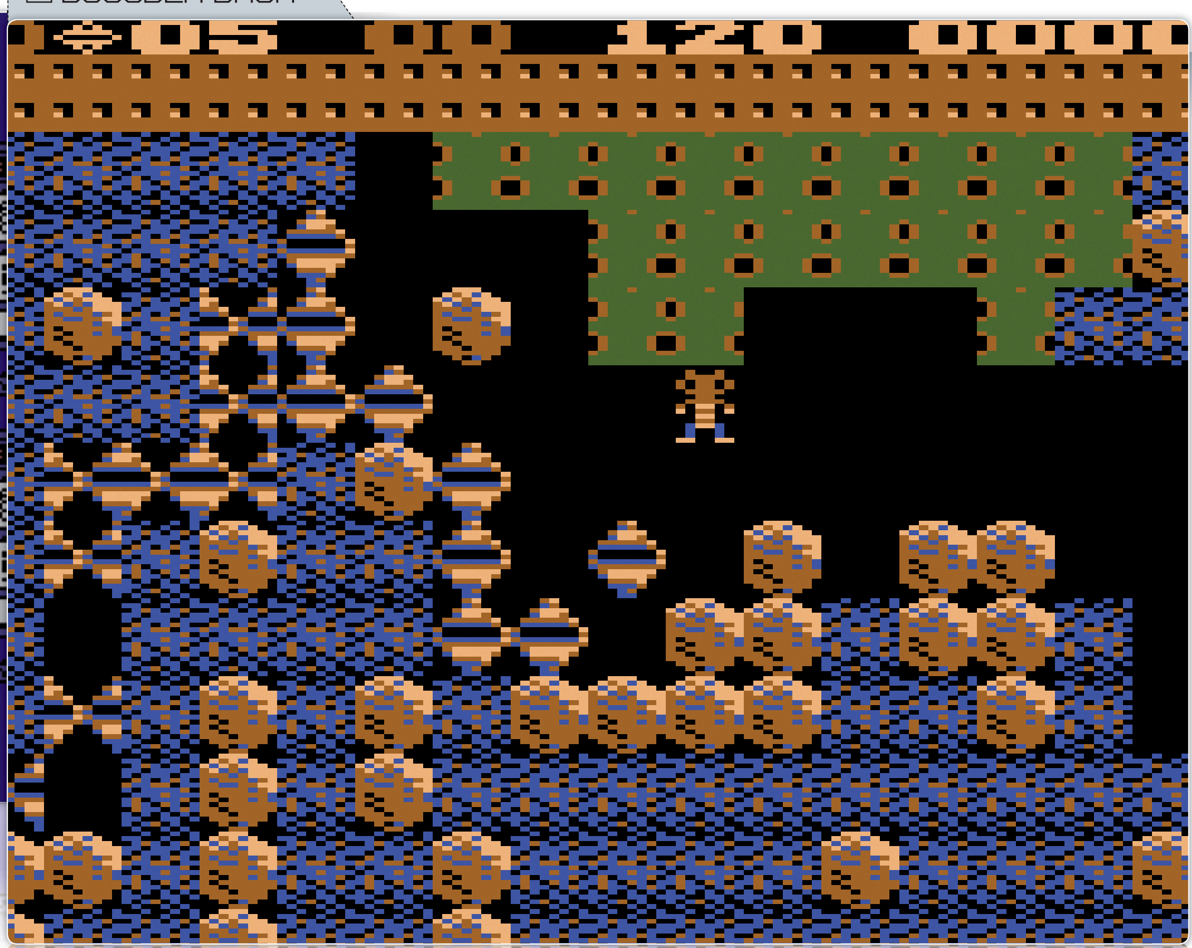
On 28 October, Rockford officially turns 25 – that was the date in 1983 when First Star Software bought all rights to *Boulder Dash* from Peter Liepa. Since then, the game has appeared on almost every major videogaming platform.

When Warner bought half of First Star Software, the games company chose three properties to work on. Of these, *Spy vs Spy* and *Superman* both had three releases, but *Wonder Woman* never got further than being a logo on FSS stationery.

Today, First Star Software mostly makes *Boulder Dash* games for various platforms, and is becoming increasingly interested in download and mobile markets such as XBLA and Apple's App Store for the iPhone.



BOULDER DASH



was going to come out under a publishing agreement with Atari, but never did," recalls Richard. "We were working on a version called *Jump*, to tie in with the Van Halen song, but that never happened." Richard says the game was ready for release before *Q*bert* arrived, but various delays meant it didn't appear until 1983. Luckily, no such delays affected Herrera's second FSS title, *Bristles*, a kind of cross between *Elevator Action* and *Pac-Man*.

Monkeying around

The next FSS title initiated a long-standing working relationship with Jim Nangano. *Flip And Flop* somewhat resembles *Q*bert* crossed with Atari's *Road Runner* coin-op and has Flip the kangaroo jumping around isometric platforms to reach marked tiles, while avoiding a zookeeper. When he's done, the viewpoint flips and the level is traversed again by Flop the monkey. Richard recalls Jim was "very talented and a key person at FSS for years," and that *Flip And Flop* was submitted while Jim was in the military: "He worked in a secret facility, tracking the world's nuclear submarines. One time, he asked me to please stop stamping 'CONFIDENTIAL' in red on the disks we were exchanging, because every time he'd enter or leave the military facility, everything he carried was inspected, and it took a long time to prove the disks didn't contain military secrets!"

By this point, FSS had a solid collection of titles, but 28 October 1983 was the date that changed the fate of the company forever: it was the day FSS purchased all rights to *Boulder Dash* from Peter Liepa. "The game was submitted to us before it was completed, and although the graphics weren't great, the gameplay was excellent," remembers Richard, who was taken in by the "mix of 'mental gymnastics' needed to figure out the solutions, in combination with the need for quick reflexes and precise movements."

> **"Boulder Dash is easy to learn, so it appeals to a large cross-section of people"**
> RICHARD SPITALNY, FIRST STAR SOFTWARE CO-FOUNDER

Richard recalls all *Boulder Dash*'s gameplay and cave designs came from Peter, with some initial help from Chris Gray, and FSS merely asked for subtle changes, such as the single-screen bonus caves and varied colour palettes. The game subsequently became FSS's bread and butter, and has stood the test of time remarkably well.

"It's easy to learn but tricky to master, which ensures it appeals to a large cross-section of people, and you can return to caves to try different solutions, collect more diamonds and beat your scores," says Richard. He also remembers Peter being a reliable, solid developer: "He never worked for FSS. He was an independent developer doing everything on his own. He designed the games, wrote the code, created his own graphics and music. And while Peter did not 'contribute', if you will, to the company itself, *Boulder Dash* has certainly been a huge part of FSS for the past 25 years; even today, it's our cornerstone."

Continually thinking of ways to expand FSS, two major deals were sealed by the company in the mid-Eighties. The first would prove be short-lived: the coin-op rights to various FSS properties were sold to Exidy, resulting in some rather odd arcade games that were based on modified Atari consoles. More important was the sale of 50 per cent of FSS to Warner, the thinking being that FSS would have access to the American ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

3 The number of *Superman* games First Star Software created.

4 The number of official *Boulder Dash* arcade games created to date.

27 The number of years that First Star Software has been in business.

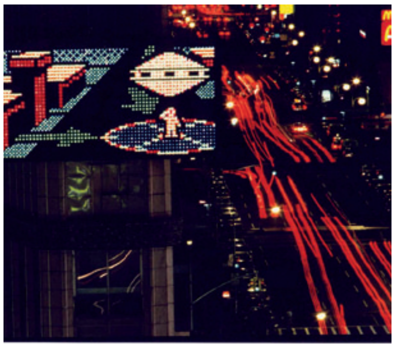
50 The percentage of First Star Software that was, for a time, owned by Warner.

25,000 Fernando Herrera's Star Award prize money from Atari in dollars for *My First Alphabet*, which inspired First Star Software's name.

250,000 How much First Star got for licensing *Astro Chase* to Parker Brothers, ensuring an easier financial ride… for a time.

1,300,000 The sum in dollars a company paid to First Star Software to license rights to *Boulder Dash* and a then-unreleased sequel. The company defaulted after making a hefty initial payment and the rights reverted to FSS.

The flying saucer from *Astro Chase* 'up in lights' at Times Square, New York City, on New Year's Eve 1982.





[C64] *My First Alphabet* not only netted its creator $25,000, but it inspired First Star's very formation.



[iPod] The latest iteration of *Boulder Dash Rocks!* is available for Apple handhelds.

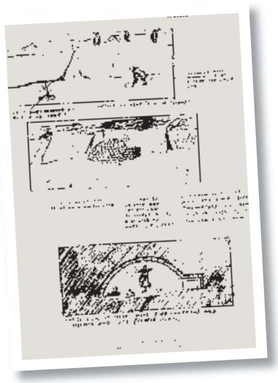
giant's channels, expertise and IP, along with a large chunk of operating cash.

For a company that, until this time, had concentrated solely on creating original videogames, the shift towards licenses might seem mercenary in nature, but Richard reckons it was merely an obvious direction for FSS to go in: "It's no secret that well-known brands help products stand out from the competition. If you've a good game, people would rather play one that stars characters they know, and often there are back stories or unique features and powers characters possess that can make for an even richer experience."

Spy game

Of the three properties FSS decided to focus on – *Spy vs Spy*, *Superman* and *Wonder Woman* – the two battling cartoon spies from *Mad* magazine surprisingly gave rise to the best-known FSS brand after *Boulder Dash*. "I was very involved with *Spy vs Spy*, and came up with Simulvision, Simulplay and the Trapulator," says Richard. "I made it a requirement of the game that players not have to take turns, and I'd picked *Spy vs Spy* from the Warner properties because I felt, if done right, the 'payoff at the very end' that's in the comic strip could be brought into an interactive game. But, to do that, you couldn't be sitting watching what the other spy was doing – you had to find a way for both players to be active at the same time."

> **"It's no secret that well-known brands help products stand out from the competition"**
> RICHARD SPITALNY



Design documents from the third *Spy vs Spy* game, *Arctic Antics*.

The split-screen dynamic was unusual for the time, but Mike Riedel ably coded the game, enabling each player or a player and computer-controlled spy to act independently, plant traps, and search for game-winning components. The same core gameplay was used with relatively few changes in two 8-bit sequels, and millions of units were sold across the three games in the series, enabling FSS to increase its internal development resources. Most importantly, says Richard, "the tremendous success with *Spy vs Spy* served to add to our credibility. We weren't a 'one-trick pony'."

Sadly, the Warner deal didn't bear further fruit. A *Wonder Woman* game never saw the light of day, and although there were three attempts at a *Superman* game, none of them are memorable for the right reasons. The disastrous C64 effort from 1985 is the worst: a nasty *Pac-Man* clone with dull mini-games, which Richard puts down to the team being over-extended with too many titles in development, along with perhaps too much ambition: "The game was released with design ideas not fully implemented

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Richard Spitalny
Co-founder of First Star Software, Richard briefly became involved with digital studio Imergy in the Nineties, working on various interactive titles. However, he returned to what he "knows and does best", and today again runs the company he started.

Billy Blake
Despite co-founding First Star Software, by 1985 Billy had returned to his original loves: movies and photography. He worked on *The Night The Lights Went Out In Georgia*, *Rhinestone*, *The Hunter's Moon* and *Pumpkinhead*, among others. Billy's photography is also regularly exhibited. He's shown at Image Gallery, New York; Universal Gallery, California; The Los Angeles Art Show at the 825 Gallery; the National Juried Photography Exhibition 2007; and the Long Island Museum of American Art.

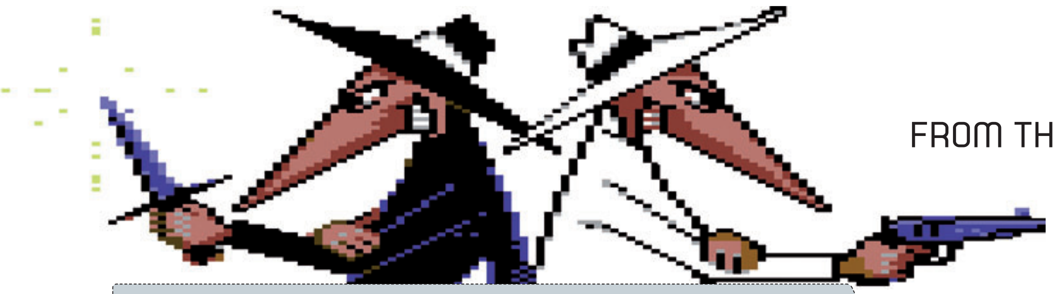
Fernando Herrera
Creator of *Astro Chase* and the inspiration for First Star's name, Fernando Herrera's credits dry up in the late Eighties, and we couldn't trace him.

Jim Nangano
Jim continued programming videogames into the Nineties, including MicroLeague sports titles. His current whereabouts are unknown.

Peter Liepa
After abruptly quitting the games industry due to its "boom and bust nature, the scarcity of good platforms after the Atari 800 and the lack of a local industry," *Boulder Dash*'s creator became seduced by the 3D computer graphics industry. Peter went on to spend 15 years at Alias/Autodesk, and his work led to nine patents. He currently works with Digital Arts, Inc.

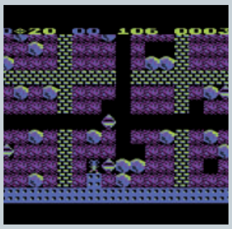
Mike Riedel
After his work with FSS, Mike continued in the games industry and has credits on titles from Hi-Tech Expressions, Ripcord and Running With Scissors, the most famous of which are the *Postal* games, for which Mike was a producer. Since 2004, Mike's moved towards engineering.





SIX OF THE BEST

Boulder Dash [1984]
Although some modern takes on *Boulder Dash* are great, with excellent cave design, Peter Liepa's original remains a standout creation. Its 16 caves, each with five variations, provide plenty of challenge, and the game's so good that it's no wonder ports still thrive on modern platforms. The Atari 8-bit release is still best, though.



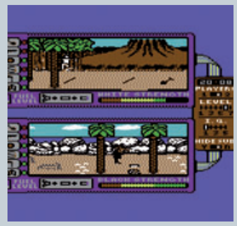
Flip And Flop [1984]
Jim Nangano's oddball collect-'em-up plays like a mix of *Q*bert* and Atari's *Road Runner*. Levels switch between a hopping Flip (a kangaroo) and hanging Flop (a monkey), tasking you with touching marked tiles and avoiding an angry zookeeper. *Clown-O-Mania* on the Amiga borrowed the concept but wasn't nearly as good.



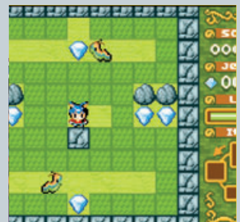
Spy vs Spy [1984]
The original *Spy vs Spy* game is a fantastic example of a split-screen approach, enabling players to play simultaneously. You can set traps for your opponent, but must be watchful of what they're up to. Plenty of humour is evident throughout and, unlike most games based on comics, *Spy vs Spy* lives up to its source material.



Spy vs Spy II: The Island Caper [1985]
Although this sequel has the same core gameplay as its predecessor, there's enough innovation to warrant its inclusion in the best-of list. The graphics are prettier, and the desert island location provides plenty of new traps, including petrol bombs, snares and pits. It's also possible to swim between islands, through shark-infested water.



Boulder Dash EX [2002]
Although playing rather differently to *Boulder Dash – EX* is slower and far more complex – this is a great re-imagining of the 8-bit classic. With more emphasis on puzzles and power-ups, *EX* is taxing and challenging, and although Rockford has been replaced by a manga reject, the game's positive qualities make up for it.



Boulder Dash XMAS 2002 Edition (2002)
Astro Chase or *Security Alert* might have got the nod if it wasn't for this festive-themed *Boulder Dash* effort. The graphics are slightly iffy, but there's no doubting the brilliant design of this game. Its cave designs rival Liepa's originals, and the map structure means that you can bypass stages you can't solve.



and some interface and control issues that negatively impacted gameplay. Also, we tried to include too much in the game, so there were lots of 'ideas' and 'things' but none were done very well."

Sequels to *Spy vs Spy* and *Boulder Dash* kept FSS going well into the Eighties, however. The former series wowed reviewers with *The Island Caper*, stranding the adversaries on a desert island surrounded by shark-infested waters. "We knew that Simulvision, Simulplay and the Trapulator were all well received by players, and so it seemed only logical to build on the success of the first game in the series and to reuse the underlying engine, which would mean we could come to market sooner than with another all-new game or approach," says Richard.

As with *Spy vs Spy*, *Boulder Dash* had several sequels in relatively quick succession. Richard notes that "once you've found something that 'works', the key is to keep adding to the brand, to the experience". Arguably, it took three attempts before *Boulder Dash* fully managed this. First, *Rockford's Revenge* provided gamers with a new set of Liepa-designed caves, but little else, and then a bizarre sequel with bas-relief graphics (see: 'The mystery of *Boulder Dash III*') did little more than make people impatient for what they really wanted: the ability to fashion their own caves.

Richard says he recalls designing and building *Boulder Dash Construction Kit* very well: "It was something we'd wanted to do, but at the 'right time', which for us was after *Rockford's Revenge*. We felt that by then there were enough fans who really understood the game inside and out and that they'd enjoy creating and sharing their own caves."

Lots of time was spent making the kit as intuitive and easy to use as possible, and it was released to rave reviews. Of course, it also put paid to any subsequent home *Boulder Dash* games – bar disappointing conversions of *Rockford*, by then the third *Boulder Dash* flirtation with the arcades – and with the third *Spy vs Spy* game being a letdown, FSS's blazing light was for the first time starting to dim.



THE MYSTERY OF BOULDER DASH III

After *Boulder Dash* and *Rockford's Revenge* came *Boulder Dash III*, a markedly different game that disappointed many with its garish, confusing, bas-relief graphics and poorly conceived cave layouts. (It nonetheless Sizzled in *Zzap!64*, suggesting that the reviewers had scoffed a few too many Jelly Babies that day.)

It takes an emailed screen grab for Richard to remember *Boulder Dash III* – he initially confuses the game with *Boulder Dash Construction Kit* – whereupon he reveals why it feels like the odd one out in the original 8-bit series: it's a clone, albeit an 'official' one.

"It was created by a licensee in Sweden: American Action AB. It was an official release, since we were paid for it and approved it, but it was not designed by Peter Liepa nor First Star Software," explains Richard. "As I recall, they came to us with a finished 'clone' and we worked something out to make it official. Proper credits and legal notices were included, and we received an advance against royalties and a continued revenue share, such that the title could come out in the mutually agreed to territories. However, First Star itself never published the game."

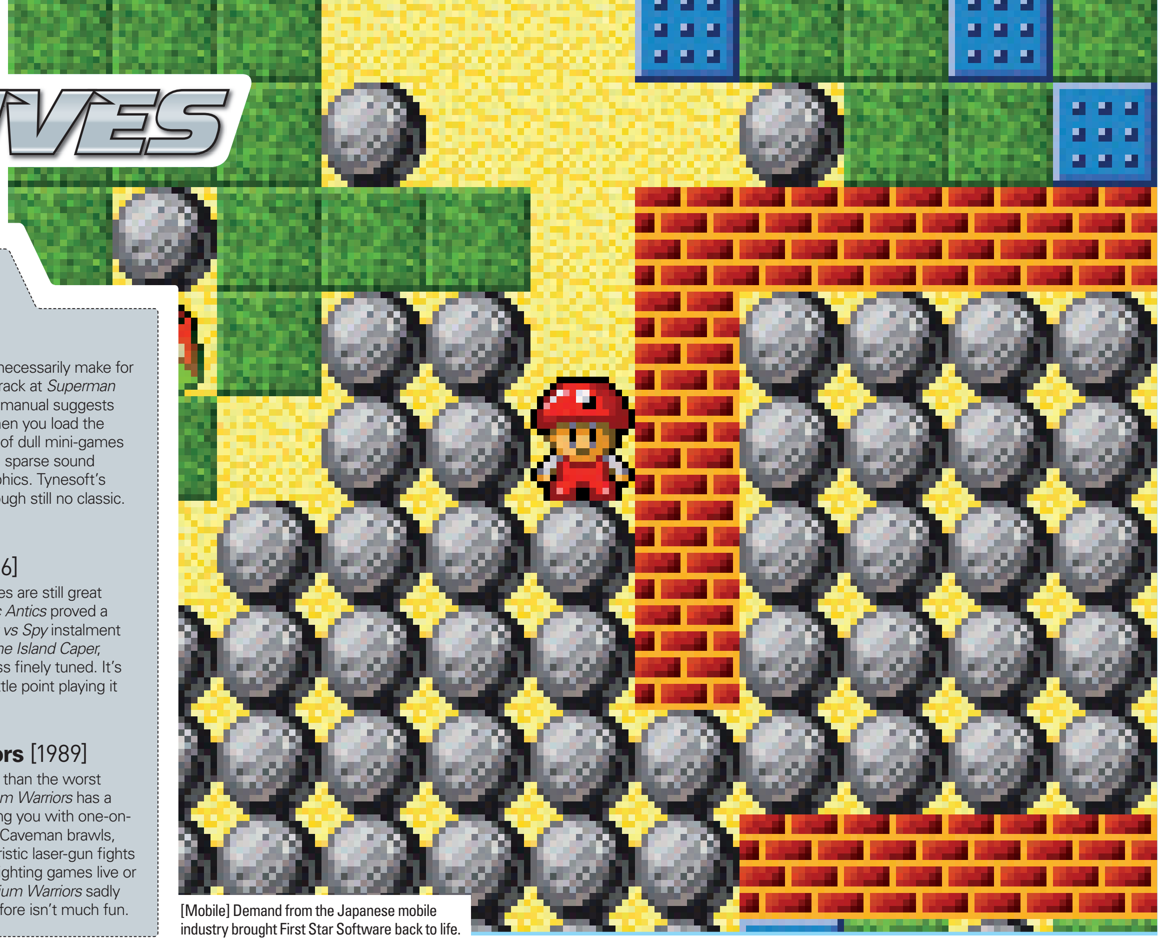




The road to nowhere

The last few years of the Eighties were a turbulent time for the company, which had previously enjoyed almost constant success. Things began to unravel with the ambitious *Omnicron Conspiracy*, a science-fiction graphical adventure game for 16-bit platforms, somewhat along the same lines as LucasArts productions. Around the same time, FSS worked on two other original titles: one-on-one fighting game *Millenium Warriors* and the noteworthy, innovative *Security Alert*, which has you breaking into various establishments, using both side-on and overhead viewpoints to defeat security systems and grab your prize.

"All three of these games included groundbreaking elements, both in terms of unique gameplay and story, but unfortunately they were created as we were leaving publishing, in an attempt to focus solely on development," says Richard. "The problem ended up being that both Epyx – for *Omnicron Conspiracy* – and Intracorp – for *Security Alert* – were themselves, struggling as publishers." The original agreement with Epyx was to deliver *Omnicron Conspiracy*, *Spy vs Spy: Arctic Antics* and *Boulder Dash Construction Kit* across numerous platforms, which FSS had never done before for a publisher – the company had previously self-published or licensed platform rights to a third-party that handled the ports. "As it turned out, due to the inevitable submission-review-revise-resubmit-review and approval process between developer and publisher, in this particular case due to shortcomings at both FSS and Epyx, we pretty much



[Mobile] Demand from the Japanese mobile industry brought First Star Software back to life.

THREE TO AVOID



Superman [1985]

Plenty of ambition doesn't necessarily make for a great game, as this first crack at *Superman* proves. A quick read of the manual suggests there's plenty to do, but when you load the game, you find a collection of dull mini-games with unresponsive controls, sparse sound effects and uninspiring graphics. Tynesoft's later attempt is better, although still no classic.



Spy vs Spy III: Arctic Antics [1986]

The previous two *Spy* games are still great fun, but even in 1986 *Arctic Antics* proved a game too far. The third *Spy vs Spy* instalment lacks the visual appeal of *The Island Caper*, and its gameplay seems less finely tuned. It's not a disaster, but there's little point playing it over its predecessors.



Millenium Warriors [1989]

More a missed opportunity than the worst game in the world, *Millenium Warriors* has a decent idea behind it, tasking you with one-on-one battles in various eras. Caveman brawls, pirate swordfights and futuristic laser-gun fights look nice, but one-on-one fighting games live or die by their controls; *Millenium Warriors* sadly proves awkward, and therefore isn't much fun.

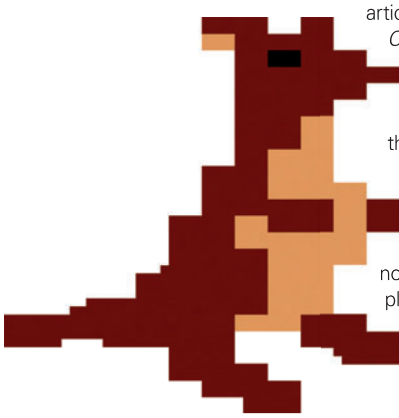
got eaten up alive," recalls Richard, sadly. "By that I mean that the time and money we expended in developing all of these SKUs was much more than we earned from royalties, advances and sales combined."

In a relatively short space of time, FSS went from a solid, profitable company to one that barely existed. The sales department had previously been closed, as FSS segued from development and publishing to development-only, but now the development department closed its doors as well, with the exception of Fernando Herrera, who completed *Security Alert* for the C64 on his own.

Just one more game arrived from FSS under a traditional development model – a reworked, technically groundbreaking take on its very first release. "*Millenium Warriors* for C64 wasn't released until it was included as part of *First Star Software's Greatest Hits*, but it was the first project we worked on with Ofer Alon, and he went on to co-create the Software Accelerated Graphics Engine (SAGE),

"I made it a requirement of Spy vs Spy that players not have to take turns"

RICHARD SPITALNY



which served as the engine for *Astro Chase 3D* on the Mac," says Richard.

Chances are, few people reading this article will be aware that *Astro Chase* had a sequel, but in its target market, *Astro Chase 3D* reviewed just as well as its forebear. The game takes the original's core gameplay and turns it into a fast-paced 3D shooter. The unique rendering engine wowed Mac users at the time – some noting how, while ageing systems played the likes of *Doom II* in a box-like window, *Astro Chase 3D* happily ran flawlessly at twice the screen resolution – and the mouse-based control system proved fluid and intuitive.

Despite this sole very successful release and plentiful positive reviews, along with the underlying SAGE engine working brilliantly, further games didn't appear. "We unfortunately were not able to come to terms internally with Ofer as how best to exploit the engine," says Richard. "We had lots of significant interest from some very large companies, but they were only interested if we would port SAGE to the PC and Ofer felt strongly that we should stay with the Mac. Ultimately we ended that partnership."

For a while, it seemed like FSS's doors would remain forever shut. Although Billy Blake had departed, Richard had stuck with the company, but by 1995 even he'd had enough: "There was a period where I got involved with another company – a digital studio, as they were called in the 'dotcom' days. I personally needed to recharge my batteries – they'd been badly drained by the time, money and effort invested in SAGE, ultimately, all for naught."

TIMELINE

1982 – AN INVESTOR OFFERS $250,000 FOR C64 *ASTRO CHASE* RIGHTS. RICHARD SPITALNY AND BILLY BLAKE REJECT THE DEAL AND FOUND FIRST STAR SOFTWARE (FSS) TO CREATE AND PUBLISH THEIR OWN VIDEOGAMES.

1983 – $250,000 DEAL SIGNED WITH PARKER BROTHERS FOR ATARI AND COLECO *ASTRO CHASE* RIGHTS. *BOULDER DASH* RIGHTS PURCHASED FROM PETER LIEPA.

1984 – COIN-OP RIGHTS TO FSS GAMES LICENSED TO EXIDY. *BOULDER DASH* RIGHTS LICENSED TO MICROLAB FOR $1.3M, WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY DEFAULTS. FIRST *SPY VS SPY* GAME RELEASED.

1989 – AGREEMENT WITH EPYX FORGED TO DELIVER GAMES ACROSS VARIOUS PLATFORMS. SHORTCOMINGS AT BOTH COMPANIES CAUSE PROBLEMS, LEADING TO *OMNICRON CONSPIRACY* BEING THE LAST GAME DEVELOPED BY THE FSS TEAM. FSS CLOSES ITS DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT.

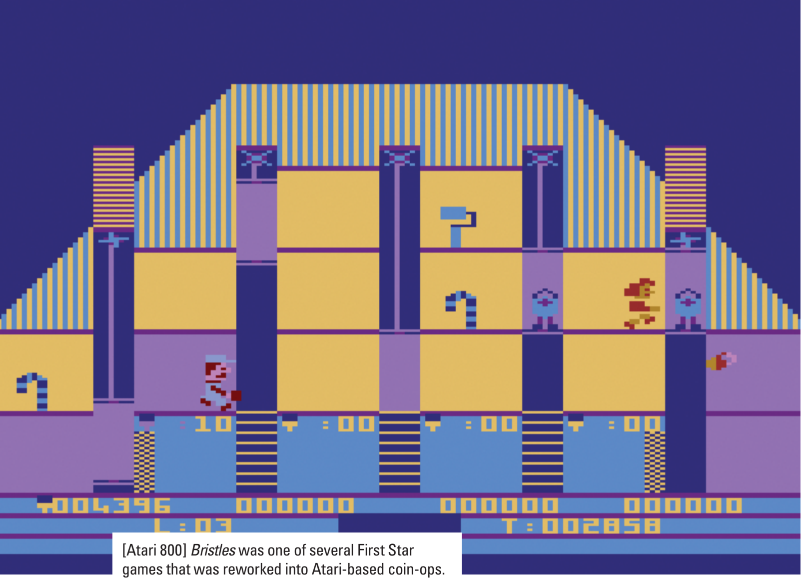
1993 – *ASTRO CHASE 3D* PREVIEWED FOR THE MAC AT SUMMER CES. IT SHIPS THE FOLLOWING YEAR, THE LAST GAME FSS PRODUCES UNDER THE TRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL.

2001 – JAVA-ENABLED *BOULDER DASH* SHIPS IN JAPAN, BEGINNING FSS'S RESURGENCE.

2003 – FSS SHIPS FIRST ONLINE/TRY-AND-BUY TITLE, *BOULDER DASH TREASURE PLEASURE*, AND ITS FIRST CELL PHONE TITLE, *BOULDER DASH ME*.

2007 – *BOULDER DASH ROCKS!* RELEASED FOR THE NINTENDO DS.

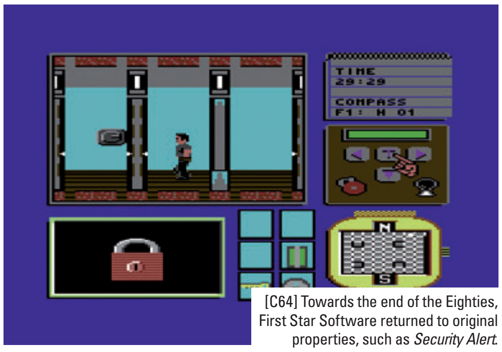
2009 – *BOULDER DASH* 25TH ANNIVERSARY RESULTS IN VARIOUS RELEASES, INCLUDING ORIGINAL *BOULDER DASH* AND *BOULDER DASH ROCKS!* FOR THE iPHONE, AND RELEASES OF *ROCKS!* FOR BLACKBERRY, WINDOWS MOBILE, J2ME AND BREW, AND *BOULDER DASH PIRATE'S QUEST* FOR THE PC AND MAC.



[Atari 800] *Bristles* was one of several First Star games that was reworked into Atari-based coin-ops.







[C64] Towards the end of the Eighties, First Star Software returned to original properties, such as *Security Alert*.



[Mac] *Astro Chase 3D* was revolutionary at the time, but its cutting-edge underlying engine was never used for further games.

During this time, Richard was minority owner and senior/executive VP product development for Imergy, a company that did several *Star Trek* interactive titles for Simon & Schuster, such as *Star Trek Omnipedia*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation Interactive Technical Manual*, and *Star Trek: Captain's Chair*, along with an interactive CD-ROM based on *The Joy Of Cooking*, and various extranet sites for companies such as GE and Clairol.

But gaming was in Richard's blood, and it wasn't long before he was drawn back into the industry.

The comeback kid

After almost a decade of laying dormant, FSS sparked back to life. The re-emergence was driven by long-standing Japanese partner Kemco wanting to develop the original *Boulder Dash* for phones in Japan. When this proved successful, the more ambitious *Boulder Dash EX* was created for the Game Boy Advance, offering extended gameplay, including a multiplayer battle mode and the ability to rotate the screen. "Although the game didn't do as well as it could have, *Boulder Dash EX* convinced me *Boulder Dash* could be updated while remaining true to the game's core principles and appeal," says Richard.

Although new *Boulder Dash* features are divisive, Richard thinks they work nicely if you approach the games with an open mind; he cites slower boulder drops and a 'Zen' mode that removes the timer, enabling players to amble about caves at leisure to figure out solutions. And with this new *Boulder Dash* arsenal, there's been no stopping a reinvigorated FSS. Since 2002, we've seen numerous games based around the property, including the impressive *XMAS 2002* edition for the PC and the pretty *Boulder Dash Rocks!* for various handheld systems.

Major changes to FSS's most famous property have been echoed in the company itself. These days, it only develops games with full development partners. "We do not pay royalty advances. All development is handled and financed by the developer," explains Richard. "We provide the IP, game design documents and a [producer] for the project. The developer is responsible for code, art, music, QA, and so on. We then arrange for distribution or co-publish with a strong partner for a given platform, and we share royalties on a 50/50 basis."

For FSS, this streamlined approach provides the opportunity to compete on a level playing field with industry giants. Online try-and-buy, Flash games via DotEmu's EasyRetro portal – currently *Boulder Dash: Arcade*, but soon also *Astro Chase*, *Bristles* and *Flip And Flop* – and download networks and mobile platforms have proved fruitful for FSS, reducing inventory risks, marketing expenses and time to market. The original *Boulder Dash* is on Virtual Console, and Richard is aiming to see Rockford infiltrate XBLA, DSiWare and PSP Go. This reliance on digital distribution also, perhaps inevitably, resulted in games for the iPhone, with the original *Boulder Dash* and a tweaked *Boulder Dash Rocks!* on the App Store.

Despite all this new technology, Richard remains very aware that his company began in 1982 and now spends an awful lot of time reworking a 25-year-old game. "But I find the increased interest in retro gaming very interesting," he says. "I think it says something about the fact that while we enjoy 3D graphics, extreme realism and huge, alternate worlds, we still crave games that are easy to get into and that can be played in short sessions."

We ask how hard it is to snare new gamers with old properties, without annoying those who loved them when they first appeared. "That's an interesting question, and we had our heads handed to us by our most die-hard fans when we previewed *Boulder Dash* for iPod," laughs Richard. "Our intention was to release the game with its original caves but updated graphics. Well, let me tell you, when those screenshots came out, the forums lit up, letting us know, in no uncertain terms, that this would not stand!" In the end, a retro mode eventually became the default.

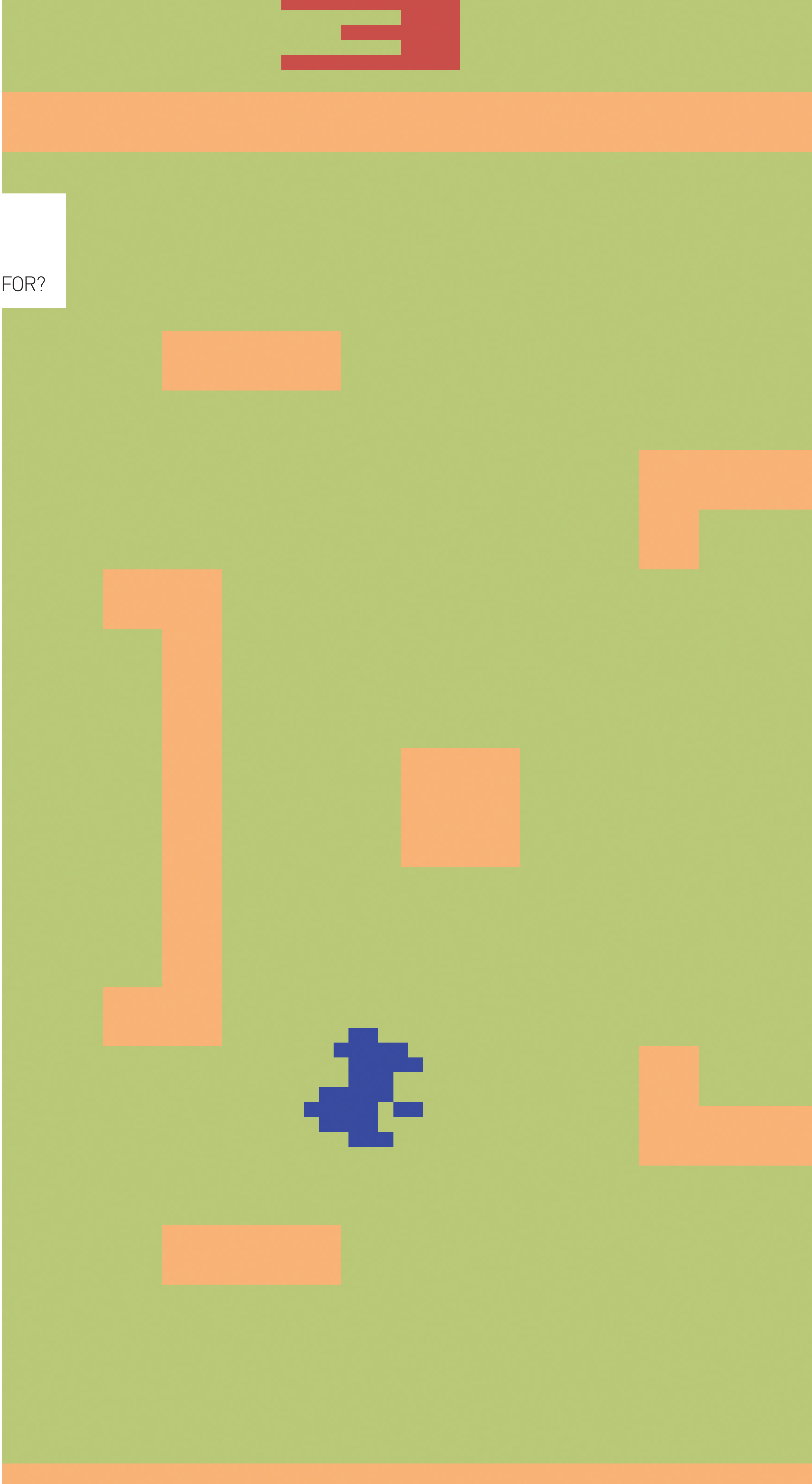
Much of FSS's future depends on the success of its Flash and iPod games, along with upcoming productions for XBLA. But Richard says FSS's prospects aren't entirely reliant on the past: "We do have one or two new game ideas that we're playing with, which, if they come to fruition, will be the first all-new games from us in many, many years!"

THE CHANGING FACE OF BOULDER DASH

From cave-mite to miner to strange cat-like thing, the appearance of *Boulder Dash*'s protagonist has changed more often than Madonna's – surprising for First Star's 'mascot'. "We love the original Rockford," affirms Richard, "but over the past 25 years, it seemed like a good idea to have him evolve as technology improved and expectations for in-game graphics increased. Also, with *Boulder Dash* appealing to female players, we introduced Crystal – Rockford's sister – which appears successful when noting the number of Crystal 'avatars' for *Treasure Pleasure* and *Pirate's Quest* online high-score tables."





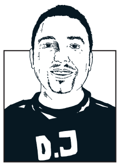


COMBAT

WAR… HUH… WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?



- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **RELEASED:** 1977
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI 2600
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

Ah, *Combat*… 32 years old and you're still thoroughly entertaining to play. While not entirely original – it takes elements from Atari's own *Tank* and Coleco's *Telstar Combat* – it is the superb 2600 effort that we still find ourselves returning to.

The game itself is pure simplicity: you pummel your rival tank with bullets and try to score a set number of points before your opponent does. Take him out before he manages to hit you and he'll be hurled across the game screen, allowing the whole deadly chase to begin anew. It's a wonderful, highly competitive concept, and I've lost count of the number of arguments I've had with friends when playing it.

The real beauty of *Combat*, though, was that there was so much to it. In addition to tanks you had access to biplanes and jets, both of which moved significantly faster than their ground counterparts, and, due to not being restricted by an arena, could move off one side of the screen and appear on the other.

In addition to different vehicles it was also possible to choose from several types of shots, meaning that the tank had access to standard or guided missiles, while the jet and biplane could also use machine guns. Successfully guiding a missile onto your stricken opponent still manages to fill you with immense satisfaction. There's an impressive selection of different arenas to choose from as well, with certain levels featuring cleverly designed mazes to negotiate. By far the best addition to *Combat*, though, was Tank Pong, an ingenious twist on the usual game that allowed you to bounce your shots off walls.

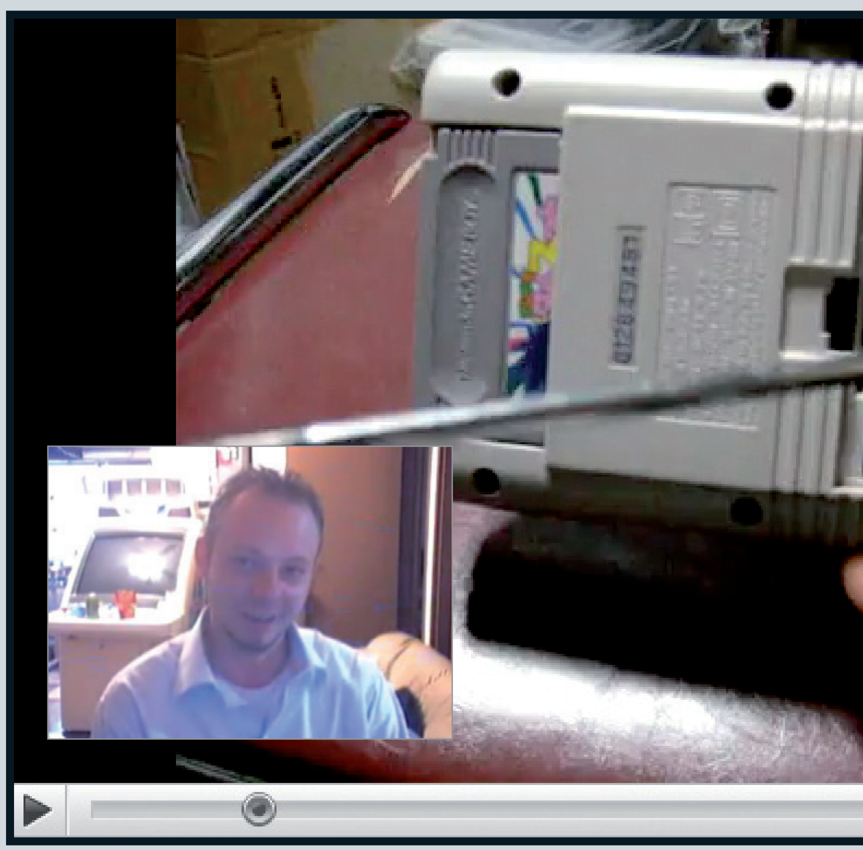
All in all there were an impressive 27 game modes to choose from, and while there was no single-player support, it remains one of the greatest party games to ever appear on Atari's machine. It may have looked incredibly ugly, even back in the day, but *Combat* is all about its amazing gameplay, and for that I'll be eternally grateful.





Retro Tube

Darran Jones guides you through the burgeoning retro community that's currently thriving on YouTube





One of the things we love most about retro gaming is the passion it elicits in certain people. Whenever we visit retro events such as Retro Fusion or Retro Reunited, or simply hang out on the forum, it's always a pleasure to discover that there are like-minded people out there who love retro gaming just as much as we do.

The latest phenomenon that we've noticed is the retro goodness currently available on YouTube. Of course you'll always find dodgy snippets of movies, pratfalls, music videos and a whole host of content dedicated to the very latest videogames releases, but you'll also discover that a hell of a lot of history is being documented on the site as well. Type in your favourite classic game, from *Sonic The Hedgehog* to *M.U.L.E.*, and odds are, someone has uploaded a video dedicated to it, meaning that there's a constant wealth of classic information at your fingertips.

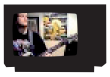
And therein lies the problem. A bewildering array of videos are available, and as a result it can be a real nightmare to find anything of real lasting interest. As with all aspects of retro gaming, though, if you are prepared to do a little bit of hard work, you'll reap the rewards. So, with that in mind, we've searched high and low to discover some of the best channels for retro gamers with every different taste catered for.

Some of them have impossibly slick presentation, others have more than a few naughty words in them, while others still are dedicated to simply documenting the bizarre and the obscure. All of them, however, are well worth visiting if you love playing retro games as much as we do. So, without further ado, and in no particular order, let's introduce our pick of the channels that we're currently subscribed to.



metaldaniel03

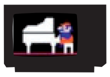
» **SPECIALITY:** VIDEOGAME MUSIC
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 66
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** FINAL FANTASY VII BATTLE THEME ON GUITAR
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/METALDANIEL03



There are plenty of great musicians re-imagining classic game scores on musical instruments, but we keep coming back to Daniel Tidwell's channel. Specialising in Squaresoft RPGs – his rendition of *Final Fantasy VII*'s battle theme has been watched 2 million times – and never afraid to give a sly wink to the camera, he's a great entertainer and has genuinely great taste in videogame music. Needless to say, fans of Squaresoft, *Castlevania* and *Zelda* will be very happy. Look out for his excellent acoustic version of *Donkey Kong Country*, which sees one of his friends stopping by to join in the fun.

garudoh

» **SPECIALITY:** VIDEOGAME MUSIC
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 535
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** SPACE CHANNEL 5
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/GARUDOH



Music is said to soothe the most savage beasts, so it should come as no surprise to learn that we're always calmed by garudoh's excellent channel, which offers over 500 videos of uninterrupted audio from an eclectic selection of games. While obvious choices from franchises such as *Castlevania*, *Final Fantasy* and *WipEout* can all be found, it's the variety that keeps us returning. We'd never really appreciated the stirring orchestral swells that accompanied *Baldur's Gate*, nor the insane soundtrack that blasts away while you're killing xenomorphs in *Aliens Vs Predator*, but we do now.





ianwilson1978

» **SPECIALITY:** JAPANESE MEGA DRIVE GAMES
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 92
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** EXPLAINED: MODIFYING THE MEGA DRIVE
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.MEGADRIVE-MEMORIES.CO.UK/

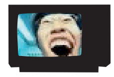


We love Ian Wilson's channel and not just because he's a regular reader and occasionally plugs the mag. Ian is obsessed with Sega's Mega Drive (in a good way, of course) and is currently in the process of collecting every released game – something we wish him luck with.

What makes Ian's videos so enjoyable is his enthusiasm for Sega's machine – it gives his videos an entertaining and informative edge. The vast majority of his vids focus on the gameplay of the various titles he picks up. Our particular favourite records his joy at finally receiving a rare copy of *Twinkle Tale*. Classic stuff.

realcatgirllover

» **SPECIALITY:** OBSCURE SYSTEMS AND GAMES
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 467
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** ROAD BLASTER CRASHES
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/REALCATGIRLLOVER



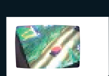
As with other YouTubers showcased here, realcatgirllover prefers to take a backseat as far as presenting goes and lets the games themselves do the talking. Specialising in covering everything from 3DO to Sega Saturn, he's skilled at unearthing amazingly obscure games. Some of them are all but impenetrable to those without knowledge of the Japanese language, but it never ceases to amaze us just how many hidden gems are still out there, waiting to be discovered by a wide audience. As long as people, like realcatgirllover, continue uploading, videogame history will live on.





Lukemorse1

» **SPECIALITY:** EVERYTHING
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 800
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** JAPANESE 101
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/LUKEMORSE1

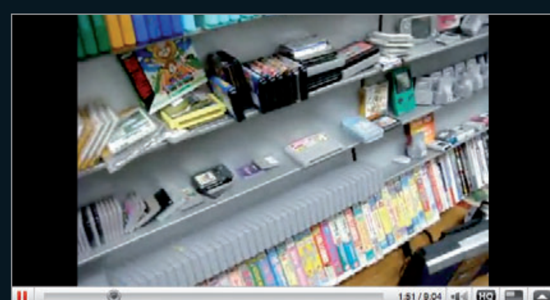


Regardless of whether you felt Lukemorse1's sombre cast entitled 'Final Video' was a cunning way of sucking in new subscribers, or a heartfelt plea to other gamers (we're fimly in the latter catagory here) there's no denying the important impact he's had and still has on the retro YouTube community.

Living in Japan and owning a staggering number of games and consoles (although many appear to have been sold off since that fateful cast) Luke's infectious enthusiasm, astounding knowledge of games and sheer love for the medium are just a few of the reasons why he now has over five thousand subscribers.

Always going out of his way to help fellow YouTubers, whether it was sending them free games, showing how to fix machines, or simply telling others about different sites, his generous nature is what may have contributed to his wife walking out on him in that very public video, which has since been taken down.

Indeed, one of the things that makes Luke's videos so interesting is that, with hindsight, you can actually see in some where the cracks in his relationship were beginning



to appear – with Luke himself seemingly oblivious to what was going on. In a way it's akin to straining your neck to breaking point in order to watch a car crash as you're driving by and it should come as no surprise to learn that he picked up over 1,000 subscribers after they discovered that supposedly final video.

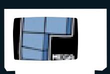
Luke is now back on YouTube after a three-week hiatus and while he's understandably cagey about his current personal relationship, there's no denying that his return has made a lot of YouTubers, us included, very, very happy.

Lukemorse1 is essential to our Youtube list, due to his amazingly entertaining output and because his channel serves as a sobering warning as to just what can happen when a hobby completely consumes you.

Retro Tube

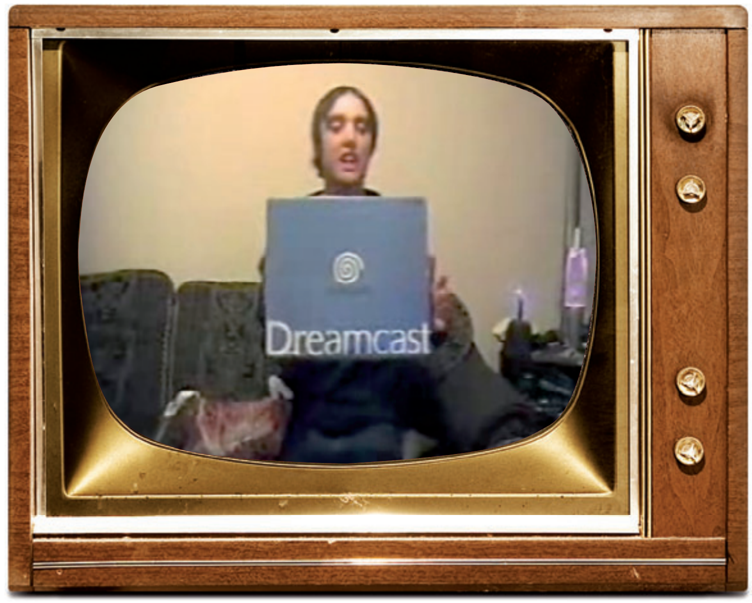
Mega64

» **SPECIALITY:** RIDICULOUSLY FUNNY VIDEOS
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 148
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** ASSASSIN'S CREED
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/ROCCOB64



Mega64 has been going for years now, but YouTube feels like the natural home for the blend of wacky humour that Rocco Botte, Derrick Acosta and Shawn Chatfield are able to pull off so well. Covering everything from classics like *Paperboy* and *Super Mario Bros 3* to contemporary releases such as *Assassin's Creed* (which is achingly funny) and *Resident Evil 4*, Mega64 is an extremely good channel. Admittedly, not every video is a success – certain shows tend to re-use ideas from previous episodes – but when these guys are on fire they release some of the best casts around. Highly recommended.





paulisthebest3uk

» **SPECIALITY:** WE'RE STILL NOT ENTIRELY SURE
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 209
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** I GO SHOPPING LOL
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/PAULISTHEBEST3UK



There's a whole host of irrelevant childish humour on YouTube. Some of it concerns games, most of it doesn't, but none of it is as good as the stuff that paulisthebest3uk is turning out (unless you're watching the re-runs of *The Smell Of Reeves And Mortimer*). Paul's videos are refreshingly honest, often hilarious, and occasionally accompanied by consumption of beer and absinthe. Madcap and always unpredictable, one minute he'll be reviewing Spectrum games, the next he'll be making a six-minute video of a blank screen, or showing off *Renegade* as it loads on the C64. Needless to say, it's always worth visiting Paul's site as you never quite know what he's going to do next.



Madroms

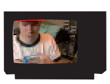
» **SPECIALITY:** SEGA SATURN
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 730
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** TRYRUSH DEPPY
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/MADROMS



Some people love commentating over their YouTube casts while others are simply content to let the videogames speak for themselves. This works particularly well at **Satakore.com** as it showcases over 200 videos for Sega's Saturn. And although the games are mainly Japanese, the vast majority of them are shoot-'em-ups, platform games and action titles, meaning that there's never a language barrier for non-Japanese-speaking gamers. Madroms' videos certainly adopt a no-frills approach, but as a guide to buying new Saturn games, you'll find it an utterly essential place to visit.

JamesNintendoNerd

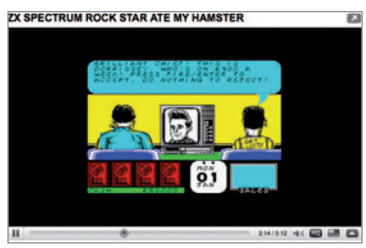
» **SPECIALITY:** RANTING, LOTS OF RANTING
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 178
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** SPIDER-MAN
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/JAMESNINTENDONERD



Unlike Mega64, The Angry Videogame Nerd, a creation by James D Rolfe, actually began life on YouTube. Originally known as The Angry Nintendo Nerd, Rolfe's videos work so well because, as well as being very funny, he's also a highly knowledgeable guy who knows a hell of a lot about the games he's actually covering.

Many of his YouTube videos are trailers for his full shows on **gametrailers.com**, but if you look hard enough you'll find treasures ranging from his encounter with *Spider-Man* on Atari 2600 to *Ghostbusters* on NES. There's a lot of foul language, but that just makes it even funnier, right?





Spinnyf**k

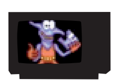
» **SPECIALITY:** SPECTRUM GAMES
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 1,038
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** ZX SPECTRUM ROCK STAR ATE MY HAMSTER
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/SPINNYF**K



You may well love Sir Clive Sinclair's ZX Spectrum, but its unlikely you love it as much as Spinnyf**k. He's uploaded over a thousand videos in the last three years, and virtually every one is devoted to the rubber-keyed wonder. Brilliantly captured, and complemented by a dry voiceover from Spinnyf**k himself, this channel is a mine of information, thanks to Spinnyf**k's excellent knowledge and the eclectic range of games he covers. He also uploads new videos on an almost daily basis, so there's always a reason to visit his channel. Quite frankly the best Spectrum resource on YouTube.

cubex55

» **SPECIALITY:** LONG PLAY VIDEOS
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 1,270
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/CUBEX55



Once upon a time it was possible to have a director's account on YouTube, which enabled you to post videos that far exceeded the ten-minute limit now in force. cubex55 features videos of fully completed games, for a variety of systems. Provided you have the time – many exceed three hours – they can be a joy to watch and very useful as a playing guide should get stuck at a specific point. They're also worth watching because the 46 dedicated individuals who pool their resources are a bloody talented bunch. You're not just watching someone die every five seconds.



cpmisalive

» **SPECIALITY:** BBC MICRO
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 270
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** ROBOTRON
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/CPMISALIVE

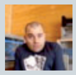


"The BBC Micro was a computer that my father had, and he often introduced it as the 'best computer ever made'," recalls cpmisalive when we asked him about his online dedication to Acorn's machine. "It's a very honest, open computer. You turn it on and there's a whole world of possibility right there," he continues when we quiz him about the fact that he's now uploaded over 100 gameplay videos for Acorn's machine. Covering both the well known and the obscure – one of his videos proved the inspiration for last month's *Cowboy Shootout* – it's a great resource site for fans of the machine and proves that there was far more to it than educating the masses. "People like to reminisce and see old games and get info on running them on their own PCs and Macs," he continues when we asked him why retro channels like his prove so popular. "I often get retro collector guys from the US saying 'wow, that's a funky machine, I want one of those'." Look through his videos and you may say the same thing.



Readership Shout Outs

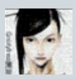
Considering it was Retro Gamer readers who first introduced Darran to the joys of YouTube's retro gaming community, it's only fair to introduce some of our favourites. Enjoy your shout outs, guys.



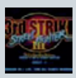
XFile2708 Like many of the channels featured here, owner XFile2708 is a regular on the **Retro Gamer** forums, and he's an incredibly nice chap, to boot. Often accompanied by his young son and concentrating on a complete PAL Mega Drive collection, his videos are always worth tuning in to.



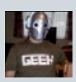
Lorfarius Although Lorfarius only started posting videos at the beginning of the year, he's already built up a solid selection of entertaining casts and loyal subscribers. Variety is the spice of life for Keith, and with his collecting spread across 18 different systems there's plenty to watch.



gmintyfresh This **Retro Gamer** forum member has only recently started uploading videos, but as he loves shooters nearly as much as Darran does, we just had to include him. He's currently specialising in newer shooters for Xbox 360, but don't let that put you off.



TheShend Capcom's *Street Fighter 3rd Strike* is quite simply the best 2D fighter ever made. Phil knows this better than anyone as he's uploaded over three thousand vids dedicated to the amazing brawler. An accomplished player himself, he's at his happiest when he's archiving fights by some of the world's best players.



Interghost With YouTubers all over the world, Darran didn't expect to bump into Adam at a car boot sale. Currently in the process of completing a full set of PAL GameCube games, his channel covers everything from commercials to gameplay vids.



Rad1kus

» **SPECIALITY:** NES COMMERCIALS
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 94
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** ADVENTURES OF BAYOU BILLY
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/RAD1KUS



Try as we might, it's proved tricky to find any channel that's fully dedicated to old computer-game commercials (although we've certainly found some good ones including William Shatner promoting the Commodore Vic20), but this effort from Rad1kus is pretty damned special.

Concentrating solely on adverts for Nintendo's NES, he's collated a truly excellent set of casts that not only serves as a great history piece, but also shows how hilariously horrible the haircuts of the Eighties actually were. The *Double Dragon* and *R.O.B.* adverts are some of our favourites, but there are plenty of great gems to discover on there.

Happy Console Gamer

» **SPECIALITY:** EVERYTHING
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 59
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** STRIDER SERIES REVIEW
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/HAPPYCONSOLEGAMER



HappyConsoleGamer only has 59 videos to its name, but it has amassed nearly eight thousand subscribers since setting up shop in March of 2008. Channel owner Johnny Millenium has a huge collection of games and, like the best YouTubers, is able to combine a brilliant knowledge with a genuine love of what he's discussing to make for a very entertaining show. While his videos tend to show a fair amount of favouritism towards Capcom – no bad thing, in our book – his jovial nature, infectious enthusiasm and genuinely decent attitude make him always worth watching.





LIGHT SIDE, DARK SIDE

Despite all the enthusiasm for retro gaming that exists on YouTube, some cynical detractors are using the channel to smear the good names of others. A number of unruly YouTube users have been spreading malicious rumours about several upstanding videomakers who have gone out of their way to help others, and it's often due to things like not getting shout outs (which is when YouTubers point their subscribers to other channels they enjoy), or simple misunderstandings. It's a shame it's always the minority that ruin it for everyone else. Recent accusations have even led certain people covered in this feature to pack in this genuinely enjoyable side to our favourite pastime.

Awesome Video Games

» **SPECIALITY:** NES LOVERS
» **AVAILABLE VIDEOS:** 90
» **YOU MUST WATCH:** DO THE R.O.B!
» **WEBSITE:** HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/FARFROMSUBTLE



What would you get if William and Ted "Theodore" Logan presented their very own videogame show? The answer is Awesome Video Games – and the channel itself is far funnier than the concept sounds. Unashamedly committed to all things Nintendo – especially the NES – each show features excellent presentation, nattily surreal sketches and some truly bizarre characters. Like many of the more successful YouTube productions, Awesome Video Games now features advertising and has its own set of DVDs, but don't let that put you off, they're still as passionate and dedicated to Nintendo as they were when our very own Stuart first started watching them in college.



IN THE KNOW

- » **Name:** Space Harrier
- » **Released:** 1985
- » **Publisher:** Sega
- » **Developer:** In-House
- » **Price:** £250-£400
- » **By The Same Developer:** Golden Axe

COIN-OP CAPERS

#2 Space Harrier

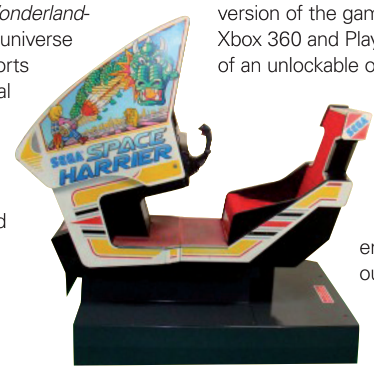
We take a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravel its brilliance with the help of those who know it best



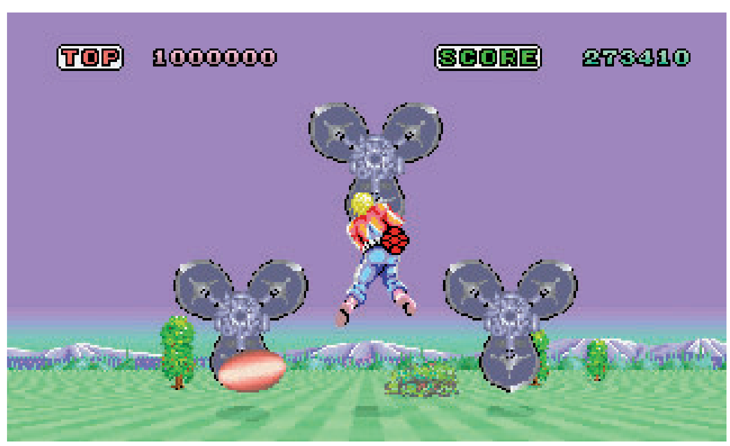
The brainchild of Sega legend Yu Suzuki, *Space Harrier* made its debut to throngs of excitable Japanese people at the 1985 Amusement Machine Show in Japan. When it arrived in arcades later that year, it shook things up in more ways than one. Resembling a kid's sit-in fairground ride spliced with an arcade machine, *Space Harrier's* vehicular cabinet was a perfect equal for the game's dazzling 3D graphics. Oozing quality from every component – its sublime soundtrack and digitised speech bleating from its twin stereo speakers, the motorised chair capable of swinging players around with real aggression, and the impressive visuals running from Sega's powerful MC68000 arcade board – it was unlike anything anyone had seen before, and ushered in a new wave of exhilarating arcade games for which Sega would soon be renowned.

Three versions of the cabinet were produced – a sit-down, an upright and the deluxe rolling variant – and all were controlled using an analogue flightstick, giving players meticulous control over the game's titular blond hero. But it was when the controls, sounds and sights were aligned with the rolling cabs that *Space Harrier* and its gameplay came into its own. Pulling on the stick gently would not only cause your hero to move appropriately, it would also cause the cab to jolt and tilt, heightening the overall experience while giving you a real sensation of flight (or close to it).

Space Harrier offered a hectic and unique arcade experience, and for an arcade game designed to suck you in and spit you out, at 18 levels long, it was surprisingly lengthy. The game was also a real pig to finish, with stages 14, Astute, and 17, Nark, proving common sticking points, and practically everything that flashes up on screen (except yourself and the Furby you ride during the bonus rounds) existing to either kill or hurt you. Another interesting point about *Space Harrier* is that the setting was the Fantasy Zone, the setting for Sega's side-scrolling shmup of the same name. In *Harrier*, however, it was depicted as being a bizarre *Alice In Wonderland*-style checkerboard universe brimming with all sorts of weird and magical creatures from a *Bad*-era Michael Jackson pop video. Memorable adversaries included cyclopic Woolly mammoths, a robot with cherries for eyes, a Chinese dragon, and some angry Easter Island masonry, and every level introduced more new enemies for Harrier to blast away. Speaking of Harrier, your hero is a blond chap dressed in blue trousers and a red sweater who has the power of flight thanks to a rather nifty jetpack/cannon thingy he carries under his arm. He's a seasoned space-war veteran tasked with restoring peace to a place called Dragon Land from a band of hostile alien creatures who are trying to depose it.



Owing to its popularity, *Space Harrier* is one of the most converted games of all time, and still pops up on modern machines to this day. Despite its odd disappearance on Mega Drive (although the console did receive an exclusive sequel) it's actually one of the few Sega series to have made appearances on every single Sega console manufactured. With late ports coming to the 32X, Saturn (via the *Sega Ages* edition) and Dreamcast in the form of *Yu Suzuki Game Works Vol 1* and mini-games in the *Shenmue* series. Most recently, an arcade-perfect version of the game has appeared on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 courtesy of an unlockable on *Sega Mega Drive Collection*. And the game also got the *Typing Of The Dead* treatment, finding players frantically destroying enemies by bashing out Japanese words on their computer. Sadly, this game was only released in Japan. *



COIN-OP CAPERS

the expert



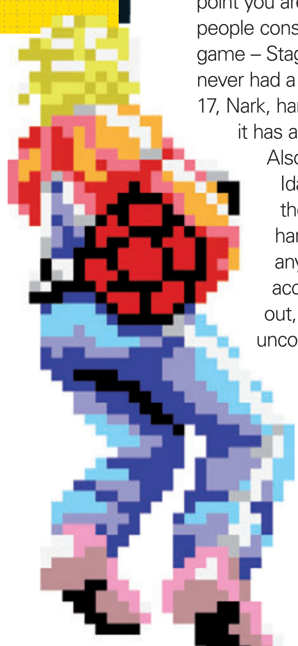
PROFILE

- **» Name:** Nick Hutt
- **» Age:** 38
- **» Date of birth:** 2 April 1971
- **» Top five games:**
  - Space Harrier
  - OutRun
  - Mad Planets
  - Star Force
  - Mr Do

Something of a *Space Harrier* expert, Nick Hutt holds the high-score record on the deluxe version and is second in the overall *Harrier* high-score rankings on Twin Galaxies

■ Please share your first impressions of the *Space Harrier* machine and tell us what impressed you most?
I seem to remember that it was on a seaside visit to Eastbourne, it was on the pier and I was just totally blown away by the moving cabinet, graphics and sound. I just had to have a go.

■ What is your favourite stage in the game, and which do you find the trickiest to finish?
I would have to say Stage 15, Vicel. I love the way the rocks kind of fall out of the sky and home in on your position, at this point you are also through what some people consider the trickiest stage of the game – Stage 14, Asute – although I've never had a problem with it. I find Stage 17, Nark, harder as it throws everything it has at you during this stage. Also the end-of-level-boss, Ida, on Stage 2 is probably the most unpredictable and hardest to kill without losing any men, because if you accidentally shoot the middle out, the remaining heads will spin uncontrollably on to your position.



■ Do you remember the first time you finished the game? If so, can you tell us about that experience?
I believe it was on Brighton Pier, they had two deluxe versions sitting side by side with the volume cranked right up, I remember pumping a load of money into it and kept continuing until I beat the game, I had a huge crowd around the machine I was playing as I don't think anyone had ever seen anyone get as far into the game as I was. It felt pretty amazing and it's something you just don't get in amusement arcades nowadays.

■ Why do you think *Space Harrier* has remained such a popular game among retro gamers?
For many it's a game they will always remember, because most decent arcades had the full-blown deluxe version sitting there blasting out 'Welcome to the fantasy zone. Get ready'. And for its time the graphics, sound, and moving seat were just totally groundbreaking and amazing. On occasion, I've had youngsters who are really into their computer games come over and play on my machines and the first ones they always go for and keep going back to play again and again are *Space Harrier* and *OutRun* so it's proof that they can still hold their own with the modern console and PC games of today.

■ Are you any good at similar Sega arcade games such as *After Burner* and *Thunder Blade*?
I'm afraid not. Although I like *After Burner,* I never seemed to be able to play it well. With all the smoke from missiles all over the screen, it made it very hard to see what was going on. Also, most *After Burner* machines seemed to vanish

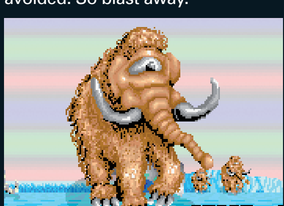


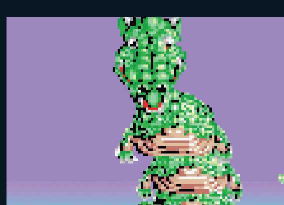
» Nick demonstrates why he's the record holder on the deluxe version of *Harrier.*

Know your enemy

Discover why *Space Harrier* gained a reputation for its imaginative enemies

Woolly mammoths
This gentle breed doesn't actually attack Harrier, instead they act like giant obstructions to be avoided. So blast away.

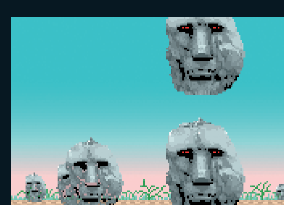




Dragon (Uriah)
Snaking back and forth, the Stage 1 boss shows off the super scaling technique of the sublime graphics. Watch out for fireballs.

Robots
These gun-wielding robots either hover around launching oversized rockets, or stand motionless like they own the place.





Easter Island Masonry
At first the Moai heads don't fire back: they fly close to the screen but don't make contact. In later stages they change their tune.

Spaceships
These are the first enemy spaceships you encounter. They're cannon fodder and can be annoying when they bunch up.



from my local seaside arcades pretty quickly so I never got the chance to play it enough to master it. *Thunder Blade* never really got any attention from me whatsoever. I always thought the cab was a bit of a cop out where, effectively, you made the machine move yourself, it wasn't motorised.

■ Can you tell us a little more about your impressive *Space Harrier* high-score record?
I set my Twin Galaxies-verified *Space Harrier* score of 35,774,740 at the Classic Gaming Expo UK in 2005. It felt pretty amazing because I had a huge crowd gathered around the machine. It has very recently been beaten by Philip Campbell with a score of 38,530,200 on a standard sit-down, but my own personal best of 37,807,960 on my rolling version is not far behind.

■ What's the secret behind achieving such an impressive score on the *Harrier* machine?
The secret to actually achieving such a score all comes down to Wee Wee Jumbo, the boss at the end of Stage 17, Nark, and being good enough to get there with all your lives, because, trust me, you will need them all here if you want a big score. The trick is to try and not actually kill him, but instead to try and shoot everything the game throws at you while trying to avoid getting shot by him. Once you're down to your last life, you need to kill Wee Wee Jumbo as fast as possible so you can progress to Stage 18 where you have to kill all the end bosses all over again, it's fairly trivial to complete the game unless you're unlucky enough to lose your last life to Ida.

■ Have you discovered any interesting elements or hidden secrets within the game?
An interesting thing to note about the end of Stage 17 is that the game behaves slightly differently: the speed of the projectiles shot at you by Wee Wee Jumbo keep increasing in speed and don't reset back to normal when you lose a life. This makes it rather tricky to hang around here for any significant length of time – for the extra score – as the projectiles eventually appear on top of you, resulting in instant death. If you decide to cheat here – using the game's Continue feature – you can make the game crash when the projectiles eventually appear off screen behind your position. If you time it right, though, and you manage to kill Wee Wee Jumbo before the game crashes, and your score is high enough, you will get a slightly different ending with lots of mushroom-cloud explosions going off as you ride off on Uriah into the distance. *

NICK'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

The expert *Space Harrier* player reveals his personal tips and strategy to mastering the game and racking up those high scores

1 **■ MAINTAIN CONTROL**
Space Harrier uses an analogue controller so thrashing it wildly will land you in a lot of trouble. You can also fire a lot faster if you use the shot buttons on the control panel rather than the trigger buttons on the control lever.

2 **■ KEEP MOVING**
The enemy will always fire on your last position so don't sit still in one place for too long; try to keep moving. If it gets too hectic and you're in trouble, circle the screen, this will usually get you out of trouble unless you're unlucky enough to get impaled on a pillar.

3 **■ RAISE YOUR GAME**
Objects in the air are worth more points than objects on the ground so always try to take out the objects in the air before annihilating the scenery. This should help you to rack up a bigger score.

4 **■ KEEP YOUR HEAD**
Ida at the end of Stage 2 is probably the hardest boss to kill without losing a life, be careful not to take out the head in the middle as this will result in the remaining heads spinning out of control on to your position, which could result in the loss of a valuable life and some score.

5 **■ WEE WEE ALL THE WAY HOME**
Finally, for a really big score you need to master the art of survival at the end of Stage 17, Nark. Try not to shoot Wee Wee Jumbo as quickly as possible, instead toy with him and shoot all the things the game throws at you and watch your score mount up.

the sequels

A look at the raft of sequels spawned by the popular space shooter



Space Harrier 3D
Released: 1988
Released to make the most of the quirky 3D glasses peripheral that Sega released for the Master System, *Space Harrier 3D* featured all-new levels and enemies but coated them with a fancy funky 3D filter that took a while to get used to. For all its promise, the game itself didn't live up to expectations. It was the second game released for the SMS and the first sequel to *Space Harrier* as it predates *Space Harrier II* by one year. It's also deemed a bit of a collector's item.



Space Harrier II
Released: 1989
Instead of releasing a straight port of *Space Harrier* on Mega Drive, Sega set AM2 to work on creating an exclusive launch sequel for its new 16-bit console. The game was just more of the same *Space Harrier* action but shorter (just 12 levels). Harrier is forced to wear a dodgy red cat suit and players can now choose the order in which they tackle the stages, which has no bearing on the actual game, other than if you're rubbish at the game you can pretend you're not.



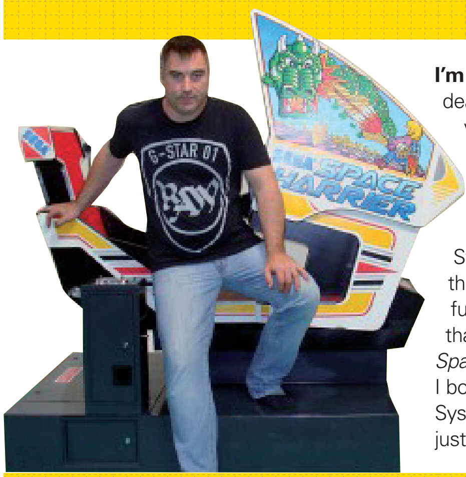
Planet Harriers
Released: 2002
Only released in arcades, *Planet Harriers* had little in common with the previous games. It was two-player, didn't feature the iconic blond hero – instead it had four badly dressed European kids with giant hypodermic needles or guitars for weapons – and adopted a *Panzer Dragoon*-style lock-on weapon system, which made it feel more like a sub *Panzer Dragoon*. Interestingly, it also highlighted the alignment of the two worlds of *Space Harrier* and *Fantasy Zone* with Opa-Opa as a secret character.



Space Harrier remake
Released: 2003
Developed by 3D Ages (a joint development studio by Sega and D3 Publisher), this 3D update was released on PS2 in 2003 as part of the *Sega Classics Collection*, also comprising lacklustre 3D remakes of *Altered Beast* and *Golden Axe*, among others, and was released separately as part of the *Sega Ages* budget collection in Japan. A functional, if ugly, 3D offering, the drab polygon graphics really aren't a patch on the original's beautifully colourful sprites.

the machine

We caught up with Matthew White to ask him about this lovingly restored rolling *Space Harrier* cab. For more info about his machine, check out his website at **www.mandccars.com/spaceharrier.htm**



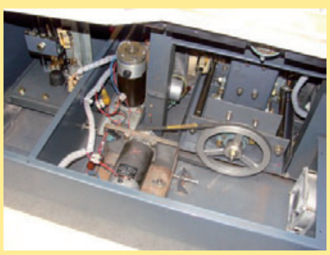
I'm Matthew White and I'm a car dealer from Derbyshire. I fell in love with *Space Harrier* when I first saw it in 1986 in Blackpool where the masses of people queuing up to play it – me included – could only get past Stage 1. This machine was one of the first arcade simulators, and was full of cutting-edge technology. From that day on I've always followed *Space Harrier*. It dictated the consoles I bought, from the Sega Master System to buying an NEC PC-Engine just for the love of this game.



SEAT

We replaced the original felt seat base with a new piece pretty simply. It looks great too.

MOTOR DRIVES



The machine works on two motors that, when operated, turn a ball screw back and forth (like you see on a lathe). One controls the machine's up and down movement and the other controls the left to right – working together they bank and roll the machine. My machine required a new ball screw and this cost me well over £250 to be replaced. Luckily my brother-in-law runs an engineering firm, which brought down the costs.

HANDLE



This was stripped down and re-coated along with the base. The buttons were just cleaned as they were not worn and worked perfectly.

COIN MECH



When I got the machine it did not have the original coin mechs, so I emailed a guy called Andréas in Germany, who has two machines – lucky guy. He kindly sent me the coin mechs and I converted these using some UK ones to take ten-pence pieces instead of German marks. Thank you, Andréas.



MARQUEE

I love the marquee, it's unusual. I chased one on eBay as a spare and it sold for well over £60.

ARTWORK

The artwork is in pretty good condition for 1986. It's near mint. I stripped the base of everything and sent it all to be professionally powder coated. So apart from a few dings, the base is near as new, the rear base stickers were professionally reproduced, and I got ten base stickers and 20 warning labels reproduced.



MONITOR



I'm not happy with the monitor, which is an old 20-inch Hantarex, but the picture is great. The good news is that I have an original Nanao to put in the cabinet as soon as I get the time.

PCB



The original top board of the PCB had a fault, it would not send signals to the motor boards thus causing errors on warm up. I located a set of boards in the USA, and when they arrived I swapped them, and the machine operated perfectly.

developer Q&A

We interview Keith Burkhill, creator of the Spectrum version of *Space Harrier*

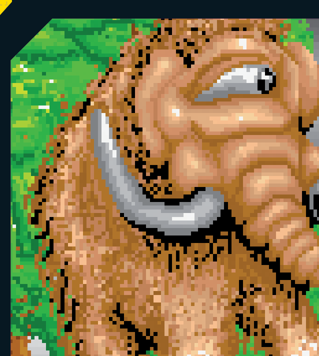
■ Can you tell us about the work you did on the Spectrum port of *Space Harrier* and how you ended up working on the project?
Well, *Space Harrier* was the next game Elite offered me after *Ghost 'N Goblins*, so it was inertia really. The game took me probably six months or more to write and I did all the coding myself while Elite supplied the art.

■ And were you a fan of the arcade machine?
I think I was. I remember it was advanced for its time. It was generally placed where anybody entering the arcade would see it, so naturally you were drawn to it.

■ Did you encounter any problems during the development of the game?
Rendering the floor and the number of sprites required a 'chasing the raster' rate of 25fps, so that was the first thing. Syncing the objects to the floor was a challenge to prevent stitching type problems. I think I used a table to convert the Z to the Y co-ordinates and the table was generated on the Spectrum at the same time as the pre-rotated floor images, then uploaded back to my Einstein. It was a bit of a bodge. Overall I spent far more time on the rendering than the gameplay, which is a weakness of a few of my titles.

■ How do you think your version compares with the other 8-bit *Space Harrier* conversions by Elite?
It looks the prettiest with the constant frame rate and so on, but its gameplay is weaker. Some input from somebody else might have helped, but back then the programmer was expected to do his own quality assurance and just about everything else, including driving it to the duplicators. On my previous game with Elite, *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, I actually did my own art, but despite the triumph of its loading screen and so on, Elite decided they would supply the art from then on.

■ What do you think about the average review scores the game garnered?
I thought it would get better reviews than it did. I remember driving all the way to Newsfield and still getting a slagging off from them in *Crash*. I think one of their C64 reviewers had taken a dislike to me and had undue influence over the reviewer of my game. I got my first fan mail for this game. I also got an email recently off somebody who said they had been inspired to go into the business by it and they were apparently quite successful now. Good for him.



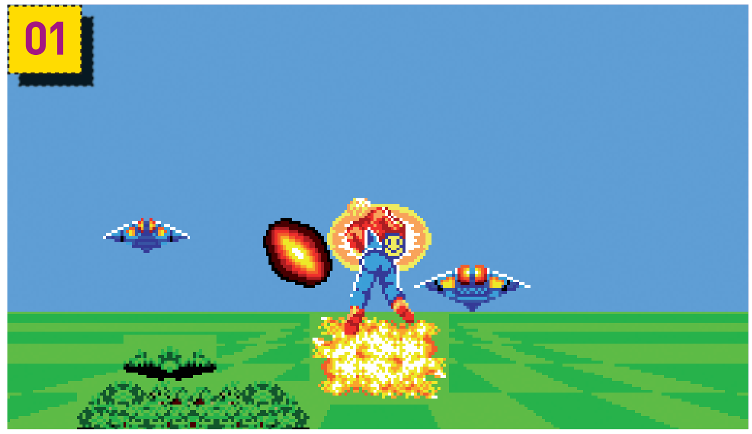
■ Did Sega offer much help and input?
I never had any contact with Sega. I got an arcade machine for the duration of the contract and that's all.

COIN-OP CAPERS

the conversions



Space Harrier appeared on scores of systems back in the day. Here are the very best and worst conversions







01. Master System

Given the technical gorge separating the Master System and a *Space Harrier* arcade machine, this port offers a decent rendition. Apart from the colours and speed, the enemies, bosses, and even the bonus stage are all present and correct, and SMS does an admirable job of faking the super scaling effect too.

02. NES (Worst Version)

The NES port was converted by Takara, and is so bad it's a blessing it never polluted our shores. The poor NES struggles to live up to the ambition of the game and at times it feels like you're driving an old banger of a car – you half expect it to break down at any moment. Ugly visuals, woolly collision detection and frequent bouts of flickering and slowdown also make this terribly unforgiving.

03. Game Gear

The Game Gear port was also developed by conversion go-to guys Takara (they did a lot of SNK ports) and was also Japan-only. Similar in style to the NES port, the action on Game Gear maintains an impressive pace and looks colourful and detailed. The only slight issue is that Harrier and his enemies are far smaller in size, making for twitchier gameplay.

04. Amstrad CPC

The presentation, background graphics and Harrier sprite all look superb, and gameplay is fast and fluid. However, enemies, ground obstructions, and gunfire are all drawn vector graphics and their transparency isn't suited to Harrier's different coloured backgrounds – it causes the sprites to bleed into one another.

05. ZX Spectrum

This just pips C64 to the post. The only niggle we have is the lack of colour, which often causes the bullet sprites to mesh with enemy ones and boss fights to feel more taxing than usual. Otherwise, this is a great conversion: the graphics are detailed and the presentation is excellent.

06. Commodore 64

A gallant effort by Chris Butler. A perfectly playable version for C64. The faux 3D effects look impressive, the graphics are colourful and the gameplay whips past at a great pace. The bold character sprites and music by musician Mark Cooksey are the icing on the cake.

07. Amiga

These graphics look superb in full screen and the gameplay is very smooth. This version faithfully re-creates the arcade music and can be controlled using the mouse, which works surprisingly well. Our only issue is that Elite split the game into two parts – the add-on disc *Space Harrier Return To The Fantasy Zone* featured the remaining few stages.

08. Atari ST

There's little between the faithful Amiga and ST versions of *Space Harrier*. Basically, the ST doesn't display the game in full-screen and is multi-load, which means the game can feel a tad clunky. Where this version excels over the Amiga port is its speed and fluidity. It's one of the most exhilarating ports there is.

09. PC-Engine/TurboGrafx-16

The PC-Engine features an impressive port and was the definitive home version. The graphics are superb and the gameplay is faithful to the arcade game. Plus you have the option to play with the controls inverted if you wish.

10. GBA

Forming one quarter of the *Sega Arcade Gallery* – a neat Sega compilation released for GBA, including *OutRun*, *Space Harrier*, *Super Hang-On* and *After Burner* – this is the best handheld *Space Harrier*. But the chaotic gameplay suffers when squeezed onto a tiny screen, and the tiny D-pad doesn't lend itself to its twitchy gameplay.

11. 32X

Save for the *Sega Ages Vol 1* version on Saturn and *Yu Suzuki Games Work Vol 1* on Dreamcast, this is the best port of *Space Harrier* there is and although it was a ten-year-old game at that time, it marks a high point in the 32X's short life. Put this next to the arcade version and you would struggle to notice the difference. Our only gripe is that it's not full screen, when, puzzlingly, 32X *After Burner* was.

12. Saturn (Best Version)

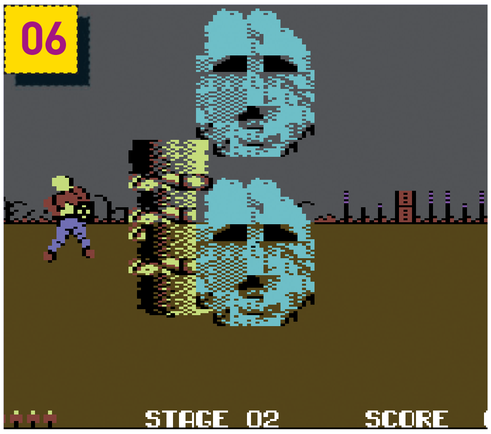
Saturn delivered a flawless version of *Space Harrier* with *Sega Ages Vol 1*. It looks bright, detailed and colourful and is displayed in glorious full-screen too. The sound is equally superb and the gameplay is as quick and as exhilarating as the arcade version of the game. Pushing it into first place, of course, is the bonus of having Sega's *OutRun* and *After Burner II* on the same disc.

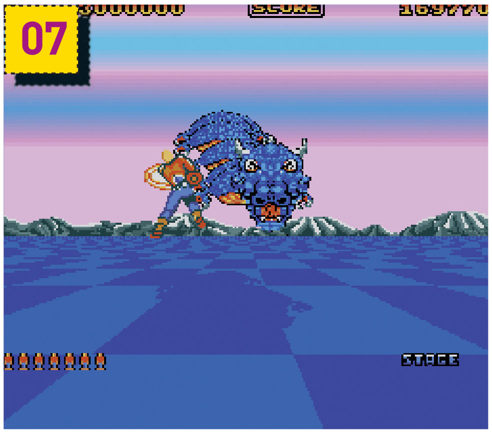
13. DOS

As far as early arcade conversions go – *OutRun* was a real shocker if we remember rightly – this remains one of the better stabs at porting a Sega arcade game to PC. Looking and feeling very similar to the ST version, despite the colours looking a little drabber, Elite's PC conversion delivered a functional port of the arcade game. By no means the best out there, it's certainly not the worst.

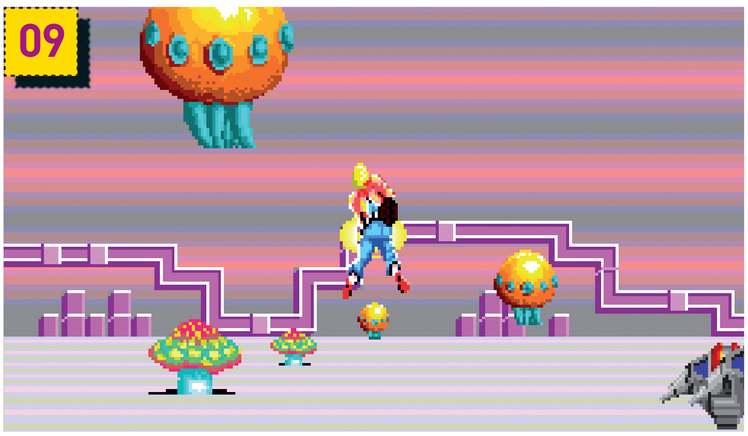
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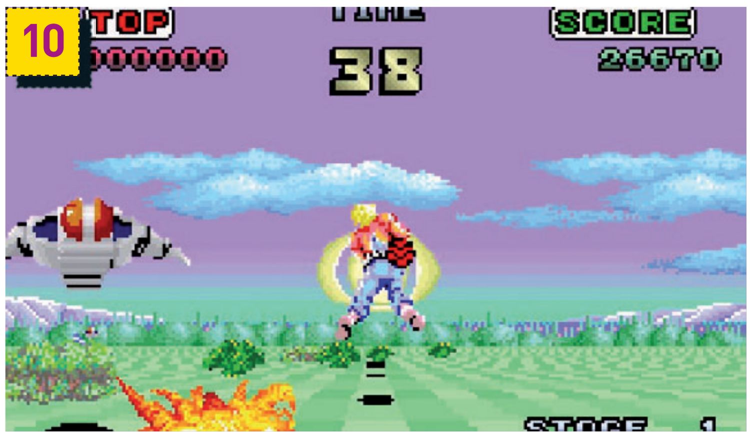

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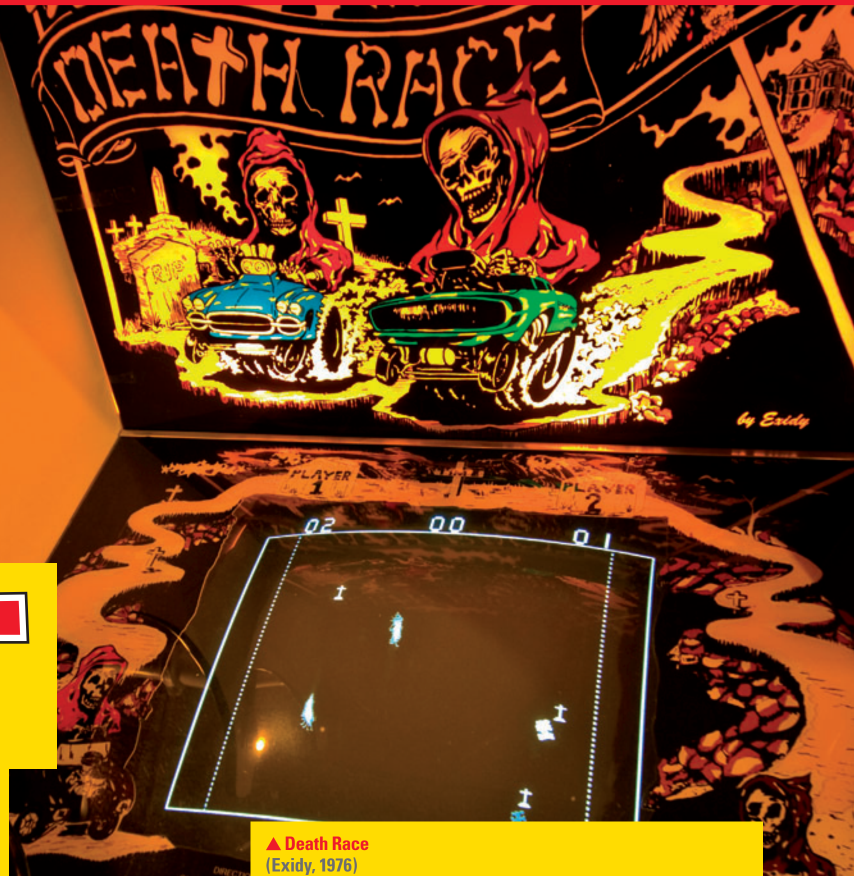
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13


Not content with being the world's largest arcade, Funspot in New Hampshire, USA, also houses the American Classic Arcade Museum, a collection of almost 300 original cabinets from the Golden Age. Curator Gary Vincent regales Paul Drury with the tales behind some of its most precious treasures

Funspot Arcade Treasures



▲ Death Race
(Exidy, 1976)
Gary: "We got it off eBay in 2007 and I knew it was in poor condition, but when it arrived, it smelt like a swamp! As soon as we got it on the dolly to move it, the bottom fell out and the front door fell off. We strapped it back together to stop it falling apart and it must have sat in the workshop for a year and a half. I seriously worried if we'd ever get it on the floor."

With help from Brian Jones and Richard Lint, Gary and his team restored this exceptionally rare yellow cabinet version of the first videogame nasty back to mint condition.



◀ Superman
(Atari, 1979)
Funspot has an impressive row of over 30 pinball tables alongside its superlative videogame collection, so we asked flipper master Dr Dave from **pinballdoctor.com** to pick one that caught his eye. "Atari were obviously known for videogames, but they made pins too. While everyone else was using the same kind of stuff in Chicago, the same moulds and same supplies, Atari said, 'No, we're going to do it all differently here in California!' *Superman* was one of their wide-body pins, designed by Steve Ritchie and sound by Eugene Jarvis. I like the whole shot up the left-hand side. A fun little table."



▶ Us vs Them
(Mylstar, 1984)
This LaserDisc rarity from *Q*Bert* creator Warren Davis lays computer graphics over video footage to create a space shoot-'em-up with wonderfully cheesy cut-scenes.

Gary: "This goes back to the mission statement of the museum: to preserve the history of coin-operated arcade games and other arcade-related memorabilia. I've been in this business long enough to remember when LaserDisc games arrived and we were all like, 'Wow, this is like playing a cartoon!' That magic wore off after about six months when a new phrase entered our vocabulary: Disc Error. 'Huh, what's a disc error? Not seen that before…' That began the long and terrible road of LaserDisc failure."

FUNSPOT ARCADE TREASURES



▲ **Computer Space**
(Nutting Associates, 1971)
Gary: "We all felt that this needed to be here. How can you have an arcade museum without the first coin-operated videogame? We got it in 2006 in very good condition but the monitor didn't work. It's actually a vacuum tube television set. When you pull it out it still has the knobs for tuning and volume! If you have something old that needs fixing, go to an old person, so I told my dad who's 77 years old and an electronics buff I had this really old TV set that needed fixing. He got it working…"



▲ **Triple Hunt**
(Atari, 1977)
Gary: "A few years ago, Curt Vendel and Mike Stuhler were here doing a project for Atari and they asked if they could take pictures of all the Atari cabinets we have. They told me we had the greatest number of them anywhere. I think it was around 65. Some were in storage and as we were pulling them out of the back room, I heard Curt go, 'Oh my god, there's a *Triple Hunt*!' He was flabbergasted. He said, 'You gotta get this working! If you do, you'll have the only working one I know of.' So we did. Not many people realise how rare that game is."

▼ **Red Baron**
(Atari, 1980)
Developed alongside *Battlezone*, this biplane blaster, often cited as the first flight simulator to offer a first-person perspective, is best enjoyed by climbing into one of the rare cockpit cabinets.

Gary: "We were lucky to get it. There aren't many around and vector games tend to have more problems than regular raster games, especially colour vector games. *Red Baron* is a beautiful cabinet, a fun game and a unique technology. There was just that small window of vector games before people said, 'We better do something more exciting than stick drawings', and moved on."



▼ **Fire Truck**
(Atari, 1978)
This behemoth of a cabinet was the first game to allow simultaneous co-operative play. The driver sat in front, steering the cab of the truck, while a second player stood behind them, trying desperately to control the wildly swinging ladder section.

Gary: "I'm told there are a few of these out there, but people don't want to part with them. A lot of firefighters like to buy them and have them in their houses, apparently. It's another machine that's been here since we bought it and is still kicking around!"





▲ **Donkey Kong II**
(Arcadeshop.com, 2008)
An ingenious hack of the original game by Jeff Kulczycki, introducing four new levels, some charming intermissions and many clever gameplay elements.

Gary: "Something of an oddity in the museum because it was only released last year, but it really follows in the line of *Donkey Kong*, so we felt it was an important piece to have. Players love it, competing with each other to push the score higher like in the old days. The artwork was donated by Richard Lint from **thisoldgame.com**, which is why the machine looks so great."

A Job for Life

ASCENDING THE STAIRS to the American Classic Arcade Museum is a magical experience. Greeted by row upon row of cabinets, pristine pieces of your childhood blinking back at you, you'll never want to leave, which is pretty much what happened to Gary Vincent. He got a summer job at Funspot in 1981, supposedly for four weeks, and ended up staying.

"The place looks pretty much like it did back then," smiles Gary, "but that was something that evolved. Back in September 1998, I was at our weekly staff meeting and asked Bob Lawton that as we had a lot of older games, would he have any objection to me putting them all together, like a museum to celebrate the history of gaming."

Bob, who founded Funspot with his brother John back in 1952 and still opens it up each morning, gave the nod. Over the following decade, the collection of classic games grew to its current total of 275, with over a dozen still awaiting restoration, including the vector trio of *Rip-Off*, *Space Wars* and *Solar Quest*. The setting, too, was restored, with the paintwork, posters and even music all chosen to recreate the arcade in its heyday.

"We've had several film crews here," adds Gary. "Scenes from *The King Of Kong*, *Chasing Ghosts* and a forthcoming production called *Altar Of The Unnamed* have all been filmed here. This place still brings back memories for me of when I started out here; all the sounds I remember from that first summer. It's a neat thing."

Your Fire Starter For Ten

Can you identify the classic arcade game from its button? Answers on the right…



[Answers: 1. *Joust* 2. *Qix* 3. *Mappy* 4. *Turkey Shoot* 5. *Cloak & Dagger* 6. *Vanguard* 7. *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* 8. *Donkey Kong 3* 9. *BurgerTime*]

THE MAKING OF...

DIE HARD TRILOGY





Die Hard Trilogy was the quirky PlayStation hit that successfully melded old-fashioned arcade action with new-fangled 3D tech. Martyn Carroll talks to the guys at Probe Entertainment who took all-American hero John McClane and placed him in a very British game

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** FOX INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** PROBE ENTERTAINMENT
- » **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **GENRE:** 3D FILM TIE-IN
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3-5



The blood on the windscreen was Simon Pick's idea. *Die Hard Trilogy*'s lead programmer and co-designer was responsible for that glorious, over-the-top moment that everyone who's played the game will always remember. You're tearing around New York City in the *Die Hard With A Vengeance* portion of the game when your yellow cab mounts the sidewalk and ploughs into screaming pedestrians. Bodies fly and blood splatters, and your vision is momentarily obscured until the windscreen wipers wash the red stuff away. "Sorry, pal!" quips McClane in typical deadpan fashion.

"Simon came up with some really crazy stuff," says James Duncan, who worked on the game as a 3D artist. "He would just come in each day with madcap ideas involving explosions or people on fire – you'll notice that there are a lot of people on fire in the game. I still, to this day, don't know how we got away with some of the stuff like the blood on the windscreen."

Simon is happy to take credit: "The blood on the windscreen was the low point, or the high point, depending on which way you look at it."

Retro Gamer met up with Simon and James in a pub in Guildford. The pair work nearby – Simon at Electronic Arts and James at Lionhead – and they were both happy to spend their lunch hours chatting about the game that has opened lots of doors for them in the industry. *Die Hard Trilogy* was actually James's first published game following spells at Digital Integration and NovaLogic, while Simon's softography stretches back to 1984 with the release of *Daredevil Dennis* on the BBC Micro. The self-taught programmer went on to work for The Sales Curve and coded a bunch of Commodore 64 and NES titles before he was invited to join Croydon-based Probe Entertainment in the mid-Nineties.

"Probe boss Fergus McGovern had a number of things that needed developing," reveals Simon, "and one of them was a PlayStation game based on some weird ITV adventure game show. And I said, 'Yeah, I'll do that. It'll



» [PlayStation] "One thing that really annoyed me was when *Driver* came out," says Simon. "They had a free roam mode where you could just drive around the city, and I thought, 'Damn it, we should have done that!'"



SEGA GAGA

DIE HARD TRILOGY is best known as a PlayStation game, but it was also released on the Saturn and PC. The Saturn version plays like a bit of a dog, and Simon reveals why: "In the previous generation, when you were doing Spectrum and Amstrad games, you could pretty much write the Spectrum version and port it to the Amstrad really easily – you just changed the render code and it all worked. We thought it would be the same with the PlayStation and Saturn, so we said we'd concentrate on the PlayStation version and then worry about the other versions later. Two or three months before the end of the project, these two guys came in and I just said, 'Here's my code, go away and port it.' It was full of PlayStation-isms, and it was the first game I'd written in C and my C code was awful, and it was a real nightmare for them, the poor buggers. It was really slow and choppy as they had to emulate a lot of the hardware, but they managed to do it."

pay the bills.' About three months into it, ITV canned the show and the game disappeared with it. Fergus said, 'That's gone, I'm afraid, but Fox is asking us about making a *Die Hard* game – are you interested in doing that?' To be honest, at the time I was so into the game show thing that I grudgingly accepted."

Although dozens of people worked on *Die Hard Trilogy*, Simon was at the team's core. He designed and coded the *Die Hard 2* and *Die Hard With A Vengeance* segments and was the overall lead programmer on the project, responsible for everything from the front end to the 3D graphics engine. The *Die Hard* game was designed by Dennis Gustafsson and programmed by Greg Modern. James worked across all three games as a 3D world modeller, which basically involved building the 3D elements that the player gets to shoot, smash up or set fire to.

Work on the game began in early 1994, when the PlayStation was still very much in development and only trusted third-parties were exposed to the new hardware. "We were sent some really early dev kits," says Simon. "They were enormous, bulky things that were like oversized PCs, and it was called the PSX at that point. For the first six months we didn't see any other PlayStation software at all, because it was all still new and secret. There was a Sony developers' conference that we went to and it was the first time we saw what other people were doing with the hardware. We were terrified going in, thinking that the others would be doing all these amazing things, but luckily everyone was doing the same kind of stuff that we were. Coming onto the PlayStation was really exciting, although it was a bit of a culture shock – there were no sprites! But the fact that you could render so much and do all the 3D stuff was amazing, and I spent the first month or so just seeing how many pixels I could get in an explosion…"

"Simon loves explosions," says James, cutting in.

"I do like explosions!" laughs Simon, and goes on to comment about the 'kitchen sink' nature of the game. "I have a very low boredom threshold, so I'd play

> **"There was certainly nothing pretentious about it. It was just a good, fun game"** JAMES DUNCAN

the game and say, 'This is boring. Let's add some more random stuff and blow it up.' We shoved everything we could think of into the game. Doing that can end up with the game becoming bloated, but it has a certain kind of charm, and I think *Die Hard Trilogy* has that charm. It clearly has no real guiding principles or game design philosophy behind it. If anybody in the team at any point said 'wouldn't it be cool if…' then we'd say 'okay, yeah, fine' and we'd put it in."

"We didn't really have any production documents on the game," adds James. "We just thought things up and went and did them. I guess, if anything, the *Die Hard* movies acted as the game's production documents."

Despite the game being in development at roughly the same time

» [PlayStation] "It was particularly funny for us because the enemies had the faces of team members," says James, "so we were shooting people we worked with."



» [PlayStation] The *Die Hard 2* section was one of the first PlayStation games to include mouse and lightgun support.



» The main impetus behind the production of *Die Hard Trilogy*, Simon Pick (standing) and Dennis Gustafsson.



THE MAKING OF…

DIE HARD TRILOGY

DIY DIE HARD

THE GAME IS packed with funny cheats – giving characters daft voices or making everyone look like Probe boss Fergus McGovern, for example – but there's one secret that was no fun whatsoever for *Die Hard 2* level designer Matt Nagy. If you pause the game and press a special button combination – right, up, down, square – you can access the built-in level editor that Matt actually used to map the *DH2* levels. Simon explains: "We didn't have any tools for doing the mapping, and there wasn't a free dev kit available for Matt to use, so we decided to actually map the game using one of those blue debug PlayStations. We built into the *Die Hard 2* engine the level editor, which Matt could use to place objects and enemies, and he mapped the whole game using that. He'd save his work to memory card, which I'd then plug in to my dev kit and pull off the data."

The *DH2* level editor was actually left in the finished game, so anyone can access it and tinker with the maps. "So you can go through the same hell as Matt," laughs James.



» [PlayStation] "It's really quite bad," says Simon about the game's blood. "I wouldn't let my eight-year-old boy play it!"

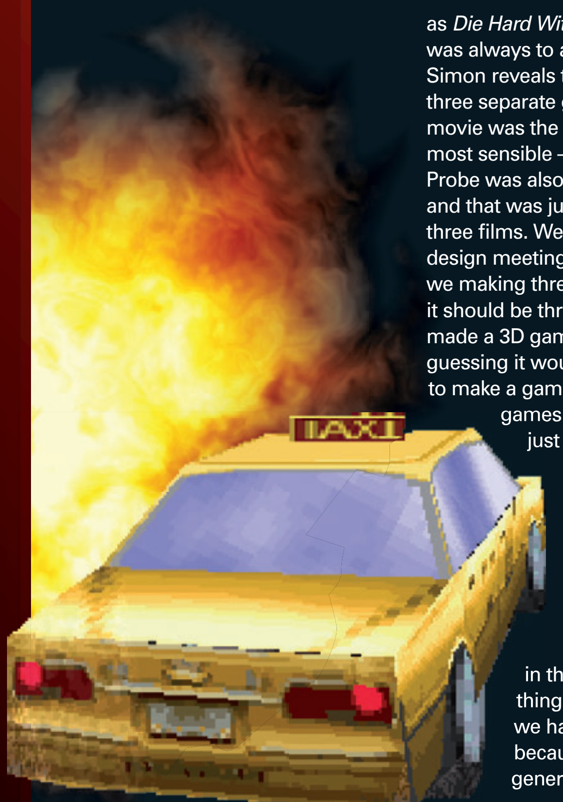


» [PlayStation] If the boss's bright red jumper didn't make him stand out, the massive signpost above his head probably did.



» [PlayStation] The hidden *Die Hard 2* level editor is exactly the same as the one used in the game's development.


» [PlayStation] One of the objectives in *DH2* was to prevent hostages from getting mowed down, if you could be bothered.



as *Die Hard With A Vengeance*, the plan was always to adapt the three films. Simon reveals that the decision to create three separate games based on each movie was the most obvious – if not the most sensible – decision. "At the time, Probe was also developing *Alien Trilogy*, and that was just one game based on the three films. We were sitting in an early design meeting and I said, 'Why aren't we making three games? It's a trilogy: it should be three games.' We'd never made a 3D game before, and we were guessing it would take about six months to make a game, so that would be three games in 18 months, which just about fit into our time schedule. It was madness in hindsight, but that's what we decided to do. And Fergus pretty much said, 'Do what you want. We trust you.' Fergus was really good and I think he was caught up in the whole excitement of the thing. I guess the main reason we had so much freedom was because we were in the first generation of 3D games and there was no one else to copy. These days when you're making a game you have to say, 'We're making this and it's kind of like *Grand Theft Auto* with a bit of this thrown in.' It's always references to other games. Back then we were unable to say what it was like, because it wasn't really like anything else."

Even now it's hard to pigeonhole *Die Hard Trilogy*, as it's a collection of three different games. *DH1* is a free-roaming third-person shooter, *DH2* is an on-rails shooter, and *DH3* is an open-city driving game. The constant is that all three feature wanton destruction and a wicked sense of humour.

Inspirations were drawn primarily from coin-op games – *DH2*, in particular, was the team's take on Sega's *Virtua Cop*, as there was a *Virtua Cop* arcade game in the Probe offices that received a lot of play. Designer Dennis Gustafsson, who was unable to join us for our lunchtime chat, provided **RG** with additional insight via email and singled out a specific arcade game: "We only had one golden rule for the direction of the gameplay: we wanted every aspect of the game to have the action of the arcade classic *Berzerk*. Full-on action from all directions. If we followed the game script so much the better, but not at the cost of the action. I think we managed to do just that. Everyone got into the spirit of the game and geared *Die Hard Trilogy* towards the crazy, no-holds-barred action title for which it has became famous."

One of the biggest difficulties the team had was taking arcade-style 2D gameplay and making it work in 3D. Breathing life into the characters was particularly tricky, and it involved using some primitive motion capture technology. "We had no idea how to do 3D people," admits Simon. "If you wanted to properly skin polygonal people you could only have about three of them on screen and the game would start to chug. So we came up with this ridiculous 'meatball man' idea, where you had eight or so bits just stuck together – one for the head, one for the body, the arms and legs and so on. Looking at them now, they look terrible, like something out of *Captain Pugwash*! Their heads wobble and there are all these stupid artefacts all over the place."

Using an early digital camera, which Fergus had acquired on a trip to Japan, photos were taken of each team member



» [PlayStation] Even without guns, *Die Hard With A Vengeance* proved to be violent.




» Designer Alec Prenter using the grid-based *DH3* level editor to map out New York City.


» The team rigged an old church with infrared cameras and used them for motion capture.



» [PlayStation] This clever visual trick lets you see through walls as you explore Nakatomi Plaza in *DH1*.

and their faces were used to give the meatball men their identities. They weren't allowed to use Bruce Willis's likeness due to licensing costs, so the McClane role went to the follically challenged Dennis: "They used me, with less and less hair retouched onto my head for each sequel. I was a lot cheaper than Bruce."

The development took between 18 months and two years, and as the release date approached, the team had to clock up the overtime to finish it. "We've probably made it sound like it was really good fun making the game, but towards the end of the project it was really awful," says Simon. "We were working seven-day weeks for at least three months, because it was going to be a Christmas release and we were running late. We really did crunch at the end. We were getting closer to the date when it had to be in shops, and Fox were getting more and more desperate. I believe Fox forced it through Sony's approval process because there were still crash bugs in it when it was released, which was unusual. Sony wasn't really such a big force at the time and I think Fox bullied it a bit to get the game approved."

Getting the game done was sweet for all involved, particularly as there were rumours that they'd been playing second fiddle to the 'other' *Trilogy* in development at Probe. "There was a rivalry between ourselves and the *Alien Trilogy* team," reveals Simon, "and with the imminent sale of Probe to Acclaim, everyone assumed that *Alien Trilogy* was the most likely to succeed. Understandably, Fergus wanted to make *Alien Trilogy* the best it could be to keep Acclaim happy. From our perspective, it often felt like *Alien Trilogy* was the golden child, getting the quality staff and internal plaudits. We didn't know it at the time, but we were known as 'Try Hard' instead of *Die Hard*, because we were just sitting there, trying really hard, not knowing what we were doing. The *Alien Trilogy* team was massive and its game was gorgeous. We were the underdogs, at least until our game was released. And then the world went mad."

"It was crazy," adds James. "It was my first published game and it was a fantastic experience. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. *Die Hard Trilogy* was three solid games, nothing more, but together they sealed the deal."

The game was a critical and commercial smash, and although exact sales figures are not available, it was a multimillion-unit seller and one of the strongest-performing titles during the early years of the PlayStation. Part of its success is surely due to the freedom offered to the team during development.

"It was amazing to have that level of freedom in that creative environment, and being left alone to do whatever we wanted," says James. "It will probably never happen again. It also helped that everyone on the team really liked games – we'd talk about them and play them in our lunchtimes. It really was a game made by gamers. There was certainly nothing pretentious about it. It was just a good, fun game."

"In many ways it was like one of those classic albums you read about," adds Simon. "The right people, the right place, the right time. It just worked."

And, with that, the interview ends and Simon and James return to work for the afternoon. We guess their current videogame projects are somewhat more structured and governed than *Die Hard Trilogy*. And they almost certainly include fewer explosions and people on fire.

FOX FIGHTS BACK

20TH CENTURY FOX had minimal input during the game's development, and only objected if the team added something that had nothing to do with the films. One case in point was the team's original depiction of New York City. Dennis tells the tale: "When the Fox producers saw an early demo of our driving game, the levels had jumpy hills, meandering roads and bendy curves that led into sewers. I remember they were strangely unimpressed by the wild and crazy driving experience that we had going."

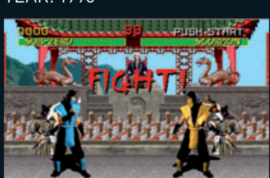
When Dennis arrived in New York to snap some location pictures for the game, he soon found out why. "One of the producers, Scott, took me downtown and literally dragged me out into the traffic. We stood in the middle of the street and Scott said 'look' and pointed down the street. I looked. Then he pointed in the opposite direction and said 'look' again. I looked. 'What do you see?' he asked. I replied: 'Straight, wide streets, no curves, no hills, no nothing. Just cars.' Scott nodded, having made his point, and walked off, leaving me to my own devices. The rest of the stay I took hundreds of pictures of all the areas that were to be included in the game."

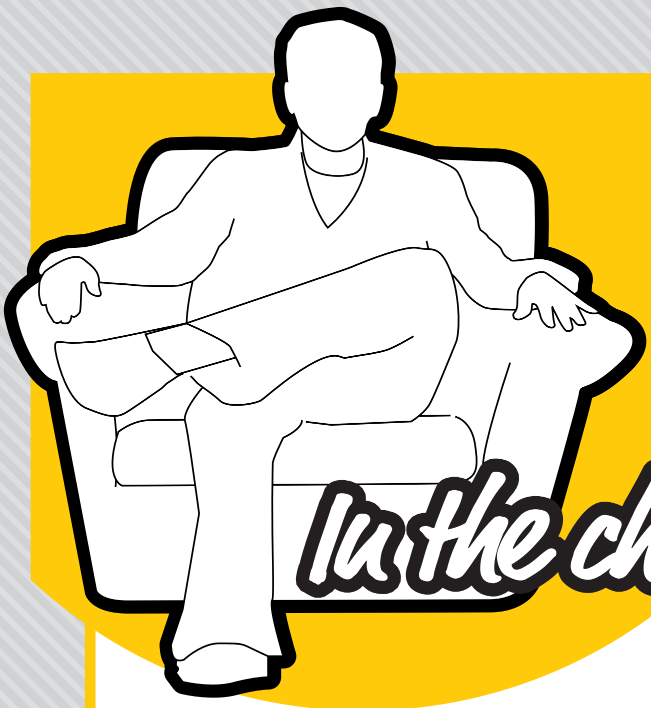
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GOLDEN AXE
SYSTEM: C64, AMIGA, ST
YEAR: 1989

MORTAL KOMBAT (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, GAME GEAR, AMIGA
YEAR: 1993

ALIEN TRILOGY
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC
YEAR: 1996





In the chair with...

GEOFF CRAMMOND

Only a select few developers have the ability to shift units by merely attaching their name to their titles, and Geoff Crammond is unquestionably a member of this elite club. In this exclusive interview, he speaks to Damien McFerran about the past, present and future

EARMARKED FOR A successful career in electronics, Geoff Crammond approached the concept of creating videogames as an outlet for his creative urges; what was supposed to be a harmless hobby ended up becoming his full-time job. After cutting his teeth on the BBC Micro, Crammond went on to create some of the finest driving simulations the videogame industry has ever seen, as well as crafting The Sentinel – a game that still has the power to enchant more than two decades after its initial release. However, since his last game – 2002's Grand Prix 4 – Crammond has fallen off the radar and out of the public eye. Until now, that is…

RETRO GAMER: It's a predictable first question, but how did you become involved with programming?

GEOFF CRAMMOND: When I left university I worked for Marconi and there I learnt the high-level language Fortran, which I used to do maths modelling optimisation work; that was my first experience of programming. The computer had 32K of RAM and filled a large room. It was replaced with something considerably more powerful during my eight years there.

RG: What led you to work on the BBC Micro?

GC: A couple of years before leaving Marconi I had noticed that home computers were starting to appear and had the idea of doing some sort of 3D flying program just as a hobby. I went to a show at Olympia where the BBC Micro was on display for the first time; I was so impressed that I ordered one there and then. It arrived about six months later, probably one of the first to be dispatched. I quickly got to grips with its inbuilt language, BASIC, which I found was very similar to Fortran, but also rather slow when running. Each line of code was being interpreted into machine code in real-time rather than having been compiled into machine code before running. I realised that I would have to program the computer using a low-level assembler language, which the BBC was able to compile to produce a fast-running program.

RG: *Super Invaders* was your first game. Can you tell us a bit about this title?

GC: I bought a book on the 6502 microprocessor assembly language and then had to decide what to do. I suppose *Super Invaders* just seemed like a good game to develop in order to learn how to write a game. I instantly became addicted to the whole experience; it was like discovering a new world. I remember that visiting cousins had a go at designing some of the aliens and I actually incorporated some of them. I added a caterpillar track effect to the shooting thing at the bottom of the screen and added a tougher mode as well, where the bombs are slightly homing and the aliens' space gets narrower. The game was finished and, amazingly, compared with what was to follow, it only took me three months to complete it.

RG: How did you market the game when it came out?

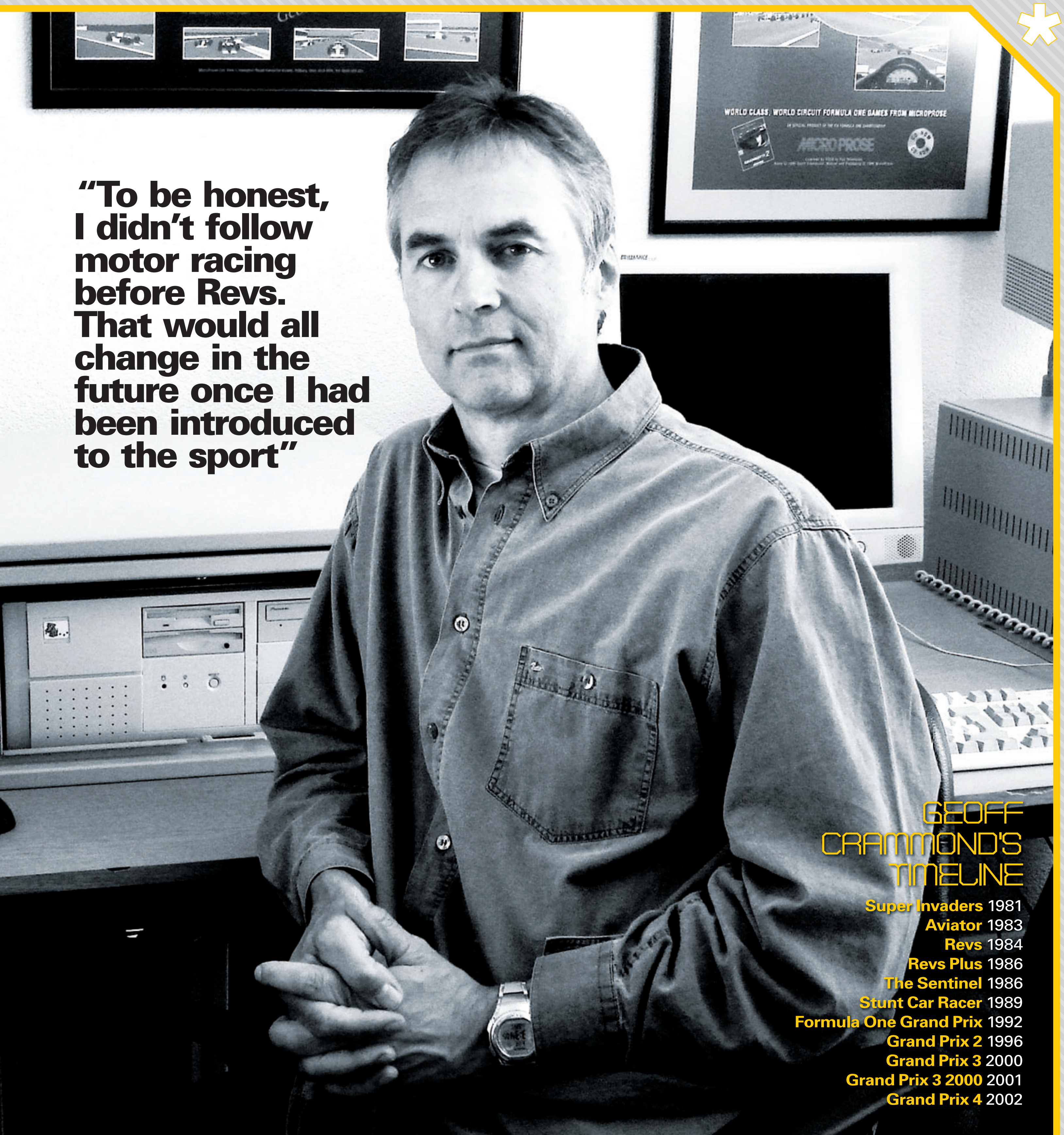
GC: As I worked on it I had the idea of maybe putting an advert in a magazine and sending off cassettes when people ordered it. By the time it was finished someone who saw it suggested approaching Acornsoft to see if they wanted to publish it. I was lucky in that although they had done versions of other popular arcade games, they hadn't done a *Space Invaders*-style title. I took it to Cambridge to show them and they liked it and published it. My foot was in the door.

RG: Can you tell us a little bit about your next game, *Aviator*?

GC: Well, after doing *Super Invaders*, Acornsoft asked what I was going to do next, and I still had my original goal in mind of creating some sort of 3D flying game. I went away and started work, with the key difference this time being that I knew it would be published, which was quite

DOWNLOAD THE PODCAST

For the full lowdown on the Geoff Crammond interview, visit **www.imaginepodcasts.com**



"To be honest, I didn't follow motor racing before Revs. That would all change in the future once I had been introduced to the sport"

GEOFF CRAMMOND'S TIMELINE

Super Invaders 1981
Aviator 1983
Revs 1984
Revs Plus 1986
The Sentinel 1986
Stunt Car Racer 1989
Formula One Grand Prix 1992
Grand Prix 2 1996
Grand Prix 3 2000
Grand Prix 3 2000 2001
Grand Prix 4 2002

awesome, really. I chose a Spitfire simply because that seemed like something that I would like to fly given a choice; I even got hold of a pilot's manual for a Spitfire and other data so I could do the simulation. *Aviator* was fascinating to work on. I hadn't done a flight sim before so it was very interesting developing the simulation. Also, I hadn't done 3D graphics before so that was all new. It was my first 3D world and took me a year to do it. I remember the game's launch was good: we did it at the Hendon Air Museum next to a real Spitfire and we had an actual Spitfire pilot from World War II as a guest.

RG: *Revs* came next and was your first experience of the genre in which you would later find worldwide fame. Were you a fan of racing beforehand?

GC: To be honest, no, I didn't follow motor racing. That would all change in the future once I had been introduced to the sport. *Revs* came about because Acorn Computers were sponsoring a Formula 3 racing driver by the name of David Hunt – the younger brother of the ex-F1 champion James Hunt. After the launch of *Aviator*, Acornsoft asked me if I could do a Formula 3 racing game given that I would have access to David and his team, who were, at that time, Eddie Jordan Racing based at Silverstone. This sounded great, so naturally I agreed.

RG: This, of course, marked a massive turning point in your career…

GC: True. It was then that I decided to leave my full-time job. Using up all my spare time on games while working at Marconi was no longer

* FIVE TO PLAY

THE SENTINEL



[Amiga] Few games have the ability to challenge *The Sentinel*'s overwhelmingly spooky vibe.

ALTHOUGH MANY WOULD argue that the *Formula One Grand Prix* series is Crammond's enduring legacy, this 1986 release remains one of the most mesmerising videogames in existence. Essentially a game in which energy management is of paramount importance, the ultimate objective is to guide your Synthoid robot to the highest point of the map, thus absorbing the power of the malevolent Sentinel, which drains your life-force whenever its gaze falls upon you. As your Synthoid is incapable of movement, you must achieve your aim by accumulating energy from other objects and creating clones, to which you can transfer your consciousness. *The Sentinel* is a timeless game despite the crude nature of the 3D visuals. In 1998 an updated version was released under the title *Sentinel Returns* from developer Hookstone, with Crammond having no direct input.

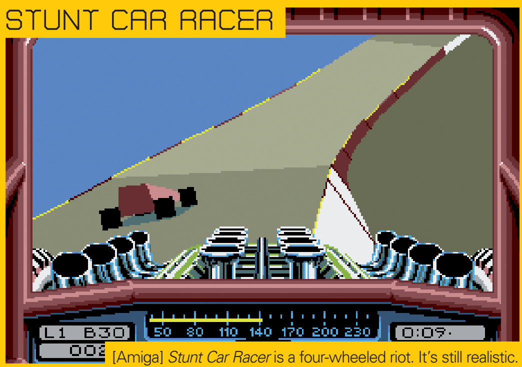
FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX



[Atari ST] Even today, *F1GP* retains its tight gameplay and intense realism.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO understate the sheer impact that Crammond's 1992 racer had on the genre as a whole; without it, games like *Gran Turismo* and *Forza Motorsport* would not exist. It was one of the first games to offer a truly accurate representation of driving a Formula 1 car and introduced players to the concept of fine-tuning their vehicle in order to get the best performance. It's a testament to the game's enduring popularity that a small community continues to tinker with the code via the open-source editor Chequered Flag. Although *GP1* has been comfortably eclipsed by later racers – including the three sequels it spawned – it's still devilishly good fun to play, even today.

STUNT CAR RACER



[Amiga] *Stunt Car Racer* is a four-wheeled riot. It's still realistic.

COMPARED TO CRAMMOND'S other racing titles, *Stunt Car Racer* feels refreshingly chaotic. The action takes place on a race track elevated from the ground, and misjudging a corner results in your car booking an appointment with terra firma. As the title suggests, much of the enjoyment to be gained revolves around performing outlandish tricks and jumps, all of which look and feel authentic thanks to the incredibly realistic physics engine. Many fans have described the game as a rollercoaster ride, which is a very apt manner in which to sum up this truly unique racer. It's a shame, then, that the proposed sequel – *Stunt Car Racer Pro* – never saw the light of day.

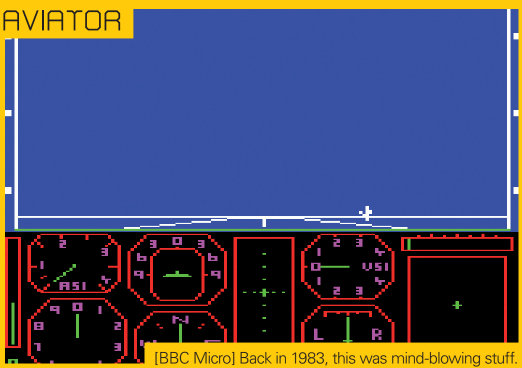
FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX 4



[PC] *GP4* is kept up to date with fan-produced mods.

THE UNDISPUTED PINNACLE of Crammond's near-legendary *Grand Prix* series, *Grand Prix 4* is deemed by many fans to be the most accurate representation of motorsport ever created, benefiting from Crammond's finely honed physics engine and an astonishingly realistic weather system. Sadly, due to arcane licensing issues, the game was saddled with a LAN multiplayer mode at a time when every other developer was looking to internet-based player-to-player link-ups, but, despite this minor niggle, *GP4* is a tremendous achievement that is unlikely to be bettered until Crammond himself starts work on *GP5*… whenever that may be.

AVIATOR



[BBC Micro] Back in 1983, this was mind-blowing stuff.

CRAMMOND'S SECOND GAME looks positively archaic now, but it's nevertheless an important release in his career and one that is worth checking out even today. The basic wireframe visuals belie an astonishing level of depth and physical realism – for example, the game featured a realistic interpretation of the g-forces that would attack your plane's wings as it dove towards the Earth. Although the game featured combat, with marauding aliens providing ample targets for your Spitfire's bullets, it's often more fun to fly around the map. Indeed, the game actively encourages it, awarding points for spectacular piloting.

tenable for me, them or my wife, so I decided with this commission that I would go full-time into a new career doing computer games. A lot of people thought I was taking a big risk and that the computer games industry might come and go like a fad. Another consideration was that we were expecting an addition to the family within months. For me, though, it was a no-brainer. I had always wanted to have my own business in something, I really liked the work, and I could see incredible opportunities ahead. Besides my technical background, I also have an arty side; I had done some oil painting when I was younger and, just before getting my first home computer, I was experimenting with airbrush painting. Also, I have played guitar since the age of about 13 and used to spend a lot of time multi-tracking and building guitar effects equipment; I even played in a band briefly. So computer games with their graphics and sound and their potential for simulation were an ideal fit for my interests in art, music and physics.

RG: What kind of research did you indulge in when you started creating *Revs*?

GC: Well, one of the first things I did was to go round the Thruxton racing circuit as a passenger in a new BMW driven by David Hunt at a corporate event. That experience made me realise that racing cars on a track was unrecognisable as an activity compared with driving a car on the road. My recollection is one of incredible g-forces and the feeling of being continually in a slide all the way round the circuit – a bit like a theme park ride, actually. I was amazed at the way David was able to feel the balance of the car and he showed me how he could steer with the throttle instead of the steering wheel. When we arrived back in the pit lane I got out of the car and saw that the tyres, which had been new when we started, were now strangely worn such that each chunk of tread had a sideways bevel of 45 degrees due to the way it had distorted while on the limit around a predominately clockwise circuit.

RG: Like *Aviator*, *Revs* was praised for its incredible realism and convincing physics. What was it like moving from a plane to a car? Did this present any challenges from a coding point of view, or was it, in fact, easier to create a realistic game engine based around the physics of a land-based vehicle?

GC: Surprisingly, I found the physics of how a car turns a corner to be trickier – or perhaps less obvious – than the physics of flight. Also, the body of a car and its wheels have a more direct connection with the road than a plane's body in air, and that makes the equations more sensitive to the attitude of the car. Refresh rates have to be higher in order to maintain mathematical stability. One of the things I did was to map the circuit in true 3D co-ordinates, which I hadn't seen done before. Racing games at that time were like *Pole Position* where a bend seemed like a distorted straight rather than something you actually arrived at. I also put red and white striped kerbs at the apexes and exits. The combination of 3D-mapped co-ordinates, apex and exit kerbs, a physics simulation and analogue joysticks meant that, even though the graphics were really crude, the brain was able to perceive the reality present and many an hour could be enjoyed just trying to squeeze another 0.1 seconds off the lap time. David Hunt raced it during development and gave me excellent feedback, so I knew it was performing realistically. Like *Aviator*, *Revs* took about a year, but this time I was working on it full-time.

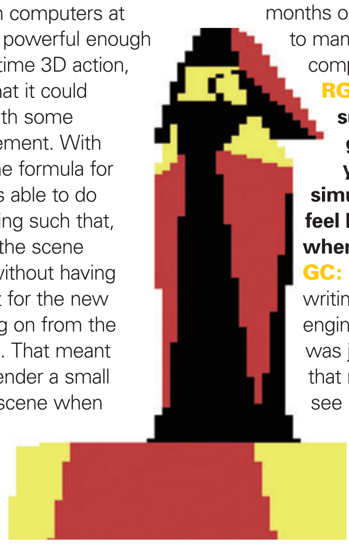


» [PC] *Grand Prix 2* was a world apart from its predecessor, showcasing texture-mapped cars and increased realism.

> "For me, going into the games industry full-time was a no-brainer"

RG: Your next project, *The Sentinel*, was something of a deviation. Can you tell us where the inspiration came from?

GC: Well, the idea for *The Sentinel* came about because it crossed my mind that, although computers at that time were not powerful enough to do detailed real-time 3D action, there was a way that it could be done – albeit with some restriction on movement. With a slight tweak to the formula for 3D projection I was able to do 3D polygon rendering such that, once constructed, the scene could be scrolled without having to re-render except for the new bit that was coming on from the edge of the screen. That meant that I only had to render a small percentage of the scene when panning around. The panning was still done in jerks, but it was real-time enough to work, and I believed that the ability to explore a 3D world would more than compensate for that characteristic. Once I had the landscape system, I then needed to devise a game to play on it. I seem to remember that it took two or three weeks to come up with the initial idea of something on a tower that you had to defeat, but once I had that then the rest fell into place shortly afterwards. The first version took about six months from start to finish. I spent the next six months or so doing conversions to many other home computers of the day.



RG: It's quite a surreal and abstract game compared to your ultra-realistic simulations. Did you feel like a change of pace when you started on it?

GC: All my games involved writing my own graphics engine, so *The Sentinel* was just another project in that respect, but I didn't see myself as necessarily only working on vehicle simulations. I was just inspired by the interactive virtual reality experience of playing the game; I suppose I consider virtual reality to be a simulation anyway.

RG: *Sentinel Returns* updated the concept for the PlayStation generation. Were you involved with the production of this title?

GC: I wasn't that heavily involved, no. I would have been too busy myself with whatever I was working on at the time. My business manager, John Cook, was a big fan of *The Sentinel* and he basically drove the *Sentinel Returns* project. I think I did supply the source code so that they would have such things as landscape generation algorithms and so on, but I expect they created the rest from their overall knowledge of how the game was supposed to play. They certainly had some nice ideas with regard to the look and feel of the 3D.

RG: 1989's *Stunt Car Racer* was your second car-based title, but this time with an emphasis on bouncy physics and exhilarating action. Why did you choose to create a title that was far more manic and action-packed?

GC: I once described how I developed *Stunt Car Racer* in a previous magazine interview and was bemused to read afterwards that someone thought I was re-writing

history and that I got the idea after seeing *Hard Drivin'* in the arcades. The truth is that I can honestly say that *Hard Drivin'* had absolutely zero influence on *Stunt Car Racer*, which had taken me three years to create. I only became aware of *Hard Drivin'* a few months before the release of *Stunt Car Racer*. The game actually started out as a sort of land-roving vehicle sim, driving around on a randomly undulating landscape. Early in development I put in physics for the suspension and was driving it around when I noticed that I had the most fun when I encountered a bit of a ramp in the landscape and took off and landed. That started me thinking, so I flattened the landscape apart from an 'up' ramp and 'down' ramp in the middle of a big field. I immediately got a great sensation when I jumped the ramp, so I added a couple more. The next thing I realised was that it was too difficult to find the ramps in the big field they were in and so I needed a track to follow to easily get from one obstacle to another. I didn't want it to be a road-racing game with cornering as the main challenge, so I chose to make the corners banked so they could be driven without having to consider taking a best racing line. I was about a year into development by now and was coding the game on the Commodore 64. I had the basic system and did a lot of experimenting with different circuits and types of track gradient. I also thought the C64 was not powerful enough to have another car on the track, and so the idea was to just do timed laps around various obstacle courses. Fortunately, I later decided that the game needed the racing mode, so I put in a single opponent. The damage system seemed like a natural counter to just keeping the foot to the floor and the boost system also added to the gameplay.

RG: What about the 16-bit versions of the game?

GC: When it came to doing the Atari ST and Amiga versions I went for polygon plotting instead of the solid fill technique on the C64. While I was working on them I noted that both machines had an RS-232 serial port. I had already done some RS-232 stuff on the BBC Micro years before – to output some *Aviator* data in real-time – and thought it would be cool to be able to link machines by connecting these ports and having a head-to-head race with a friend. That turned out to be a popular addition and I think it was quite a novelty that an Atari ST could be connected to a Commodore Amiga.

RG: What has happened to *Stunt Car Racer Pro*, which you were working on at one point with Lost Toys Studios?

GC: *Stunt Car Racer Pro* was designed fundamentally as a multiplayer game and, of course, we wouldn't have had any restrictions with online play like we did with the F1 licence in the *Grand Prix* series. It's a real shame it never happened. It was a self-financed project that simply hit a patch where publishers just weren't signing on the dotted line. We got it to a working demo stage, but as it was self-financed, we had a limited timeline before it became impractical to continue with the team. My business manager calls it the best game he never sold.



RG: *Formula One Grand Prix* is arguably the series for which you're most famous. Was it simply a natural progression from the Formula 3 action seen in *Revs*?

GC: Not long after finishing *Stunt Car Racer*, my publisher, which was MicroProse at the time, rang me up one day and said that they were in talks with McLaren about a possible licence deal and would I be interested in doing an F1 game. McLaren were, at that time, a top team with the likes of Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost driving for them. I had followed F1 avidly since doing *Revs* and it was at a time when Nigel Mansell was on the scene – I always thought he was a particularly entertaining driver. I had always expected to do an F1 game one day and with the power of machines like the Atari ST and Amiga, plus the possible licence deal, this was just the right moment for me to do it. I started with a blank sheet and just tried to make things as realistic as I could. Putting in apex and overrun kerbs that were raised off the ground seemed like a big feature back then. I had a track – Silverstone – done and an F1 car as well by the time I went to my first meeting with McLaren. That was really interesting talking to them. As it turned out, the licence deal was never done, but the project was far enough advanced for me just to carry on and finish it.

> "Putting in kerbs that were raised off the ground seemed like a big feature back then"

RG: What were your ultimate objectives when you were creating *GP1*?

GC: For me, the simulator had to be realistic but also drivable. I didn't want a game where simply getting round the next bend was a big achievement – that just wouldn't feel right. It was essential for *GP1* that there was some steering help that was effective since even the joysticks for the Atari ST and Amiga were switched joysticks – in other words, 'all or nothing'. I knew from *Revs* that keyboard operation was inferior to the BBC Micro's analogue joysticks and yet that was all there was to work with. I really took the point of view that negotiating a corner should demand the same sort of dexterity and thought process as it does in real life, and that



[PC] *Grand Prix 4* still looks gorgeous today.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

1981 was the year Crammond released his first game, *Super Invaders*. It made the equivalent of about two-thirds of his annual salary at the time

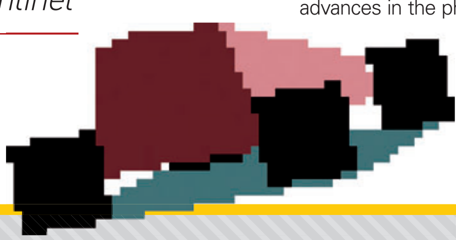
Magazine *PC Zone* awarded *Grand Prix 2* a whopping **95%**

Despite his fame, Crammond has only produced **11** games in almost three decades

Revs originally shipped with just one track – Silverstone – but an expansion was later released that granted an additional **4** circuits

26 drivers from the 1994 season were included in *Grand Prix 2*, although Ayrton Senna and Roland Ratzenberger were omitted as a token of respect – both drivers perished during that year's campaign

It took around **3** seconds for each of the scenes to render in the C64 version of *The Sentinel*





» Crammond talks us through the development of the *Grand Prix* series.

is how I decided on how steering help would work.

RG: With *Grand Prix 3* you introduced features such as variable weather effects that could change during a race – was this difficult to program?

GC: The wet weather feature was huge. That is why I left it out of *GP2*; I simply didn't have time to do it justice. *GP3* was my opportunity. The weather system was fully simulated, right down to rain-bearing clouds that come in from a distance. The wet track had variable water depth and therefore changes in grip and the whole thing could dry and have a drying line. It was also possible for one part of the circuit to be wet while the rest was dry, and so on.

RG: Although *GP3* received glowing scores, it is seen by many fans as the weakest in the series. Why do you think this is the case?

GC: If that is the case then perhaps people's perceptions are affected by graphics quality. Clearly the graphics quality of *GP2* was a big step up from *GP1*, and *GP4* is a big step up from *GP3*, but that's just the way that the graphics progressed. The reality from where I sit is that if I look at the advances in the physics of *GP4* compared with *GP2* then most of the big developments actually went into *GP3*. *GP3* had the all-new wet weather system, as I said, which was huge, but it was also the version where I completely overhauled the modelling of the transmission system and tyres and incorporated an active differential. You could do 'doughnuts' for the first time. Also, the cars were able to tumble upside down for the first time. That kind of enhancement was not trivial. *GP3 2000* also saw further additions, including being able to collide with debris, for example. The other thing to bear in mind is that sim enthusiasts can understandably sometimes get the wrong idea about something. I have seen forums where people can collectively arrive at all sorts of misconceptions about how the sim works, saying things like the simulator puts the car on rails when you use steering help or when you do a 'doughnut' the manoeuvre is 'canned', by which they mean a pre-programmed sequence of positions. The truth is that all the steering help does is feed a value to the steering wheel position in the simulator, absolutely nothing else, and 'doughnuts' are properly simulated, interactive and unique and never 'canned'. My experience has been that people have their loyalties regarding different sims and once they have decided something, there is little likelihood that they can be persuaded otherwise, particularly if they have already expressed an opinion online. If I tried to monitor all the forums trying to correct misconceptions I wouldn't have time for anything else.

RG: Around the time of *GP3*'s release, Sony had stepped up the production of its own *Formula One* franchise on the PlayStation. Although this series was markedly inferior to *Grand Prix* in terms of realism, did it influence your work on your own games?

GC: I mainly remember being impressed by the power of the PlayStation and its ability to do fast texturing. I thought leaving skid marks was a good idea.

RG: How many people worked on the development of *GP4*?

GC: There was a team of about 30 at MicroProse who worked on *GP4*. Basically I worked on the physics and AI and I took the raw GPS data and converted it into a 'physics track' mesh,

which comprised everything inside, including the fences. MicroProse took that from me and created a graphics track that incorporated the mesh of the physics track. MicroProse did the rest of the game, including all the graphics, sound and menus. Obviously I had to provide interfaces so that the sim could drive things like the sound, pit crew actions, the weather, car setups, race results, data logging and so on.

RG: Is it true that *GP4* was planned for conversion to the Xbox console? Why was it cancelled?
GC: Yes, the Xbox version of *GP4* was even demonstrated to the press during a promotion day. I thought it looked very good and worked well. It was a casualty of the MicroProse studio closure, which was announced two weeks after *GP4* was released on the PC. A couple of months work was needed to finish the Xbox version, so sadly it couldn't be done.

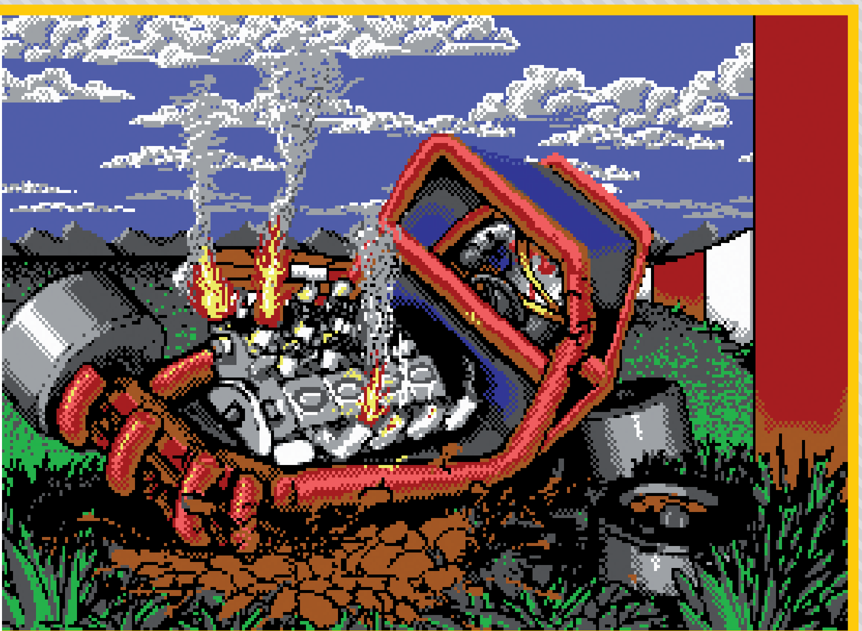
RG: Fans continue to support *GP4* with their own mods. Have you ever been consulted on them?
GC: I have never got involved with the mods. I think that because those activities are unofficial, there was never any question of me being involved for contractual reasons. However, with the closure of the studio, the support for the product, which I had expected to come from the MicroProse team and myself, has, at least in part, been replaced with the unofficial support, so in that respect it actually pleases me.
RG: Your background is actually in physics. Bearing this in mind, do you think it's possible that you approach games from a slightly different perspective than other programmers; that you look first at the potential for realism and then build the game up around that?
GC: I don't know how other programmers approach things, but I like to develop a game 'hands-on' rather than on paper. That's how I find out if something is enjoyable or not.
RG: Over the years, the size of development teams has skyrocketed as games have become ever more complex, yet back when you started programming, single-man teams were the norm. Has this shift in the industry resulted in better games do you think, or is there an argument for having smaller dev teams, which might possibly result in a more cohesive end product?
GC: There seem to be opportunities now at both ends of the spectrum. As well as the games that require big teams, an individual now can self-publish an iPhone application, for example. I have always been a fan of the small-team ethic because it is easy to control the project, the ideas and the software. But some games just require too many man-hours to do that way. After my *Stunt Car Racer Pro* experience I know that the best thing about a small team is that they can develop cheaply.

> "I have always been a fan of small teams because it is easy to control the project"

RG: Out of all the games that you've created, which one do you hold the most dear?
GC: Obviously the *Grand Prix* series of games is, for me, the pinnacle of all my games, but I think each one has been special for me for a variety of reasons: *Super Invaders* as my first game; *Aviator* as my first simulator; *Revs* as my first racing game; *The Sentinel* for its originality; and *Stunt Car Racer* for the game concept and linked play mode.

RG: Could you tell us one particularly amusing moment from your career?
GC: I was on a golf holiday in Spain with some guys who were unconnected with the games industry. We were driving in the rain and as we entered a tunnel I exclaimed loudly, with a note of surprise, "It's not raining in the tunnel!" I then had to explain that I was developing the wet weather simulation for my latest game and hadn't considered that the tunnel at Monaco would need code to stop it raining inside. They thought this was very amusing for some reason and often repeat the tale at various social events.
RG: *Amiga Power* had a running joke where you were referred to as 'Sir Geoff' within the pages of the magazine. Did you see it as a term of endearment?
GC: Yes, very much so. I actually found it a source of encouragement.
RG: Has there been any one game that has been an influence on you during your programming career?
GC: I recall when I saw Papyrus's *Indy Car Racing* with texturing for the first time I knew I would at least have to achieve a similar standard with the *GP2* graphics.
RG: Your old friend Jon Ritman recently commented that your attention to detail is astonishing and that you'd spent time incorporating features that might not necessarily get noticed by the gamer. Do you think you're somewhat obsessive in this respect, or do you feel that all of these layers of detail only add to the overall experience of realism?
GC: Look, the closest I have come to driving a real F1 car is sitting in one. The best way for me to ensure that the simulator provides a realistic simulation of the real thing is to include as much real data and as much physics as is practically possible. The best corroboration of the simulator came when I managed to get hold of some real F1 data-logging charts. Other than that, lap times were the best way of evaluating the performance of all the teams. I saw a really good thing on YouTube where some guy had filmed a *GP4* lap and also had real in-car footage of the same lap and played them simultaneously on the left and right of the screen. Visually it seemed almost identical, helped, of course, by the fact that the tracks were done using GPS data, but what was amazing was how the apexes and kerbs of each corner kept appearing in unison. I thought that was a very convincing demonstration of the simulator. I have had feedback from real drivers and it's all been positive.
RG: You've been absent from the world of videogames for a while now. Do you have any projects under development that you can tell us about?
GC: When *GP4* was over and the studio closed I started a new phase called 'having a normal life' and no longer worked seven days a week including evenings. That enabled me to do things called 'hobbies' and pursue 'interests'. However, over the seven years of this phase I have also been doing various recreational programming projects, some of which have involved research into game physics. Oh, and now I program exclusively in C++, which I really like. I'm playing around with ideas that may or may not lead to something.
RG: If resources and time weren't an issue, what kind of game do you think you would want to create? In other words, what would be your dream project?
GC: Actually, *Grand Prix 5* still feels like unfinished business, but then again something completely different could be more interesting.
RG: Are you still an avid follower of Formula One?
GC: After *GP4*, for a few years I would just watch the occasional race. I really became interested again with the arrival of Lewis Hamilton and was glad he managed to clinch the championship last year after just missing out the year before. It must have been tough for Jenson Button seeing this new kid on the block in a competitive car and doing so well, but he hung in there. Who could have predicted such a turnaround? This season has been amazing so far and I'd just like to say well done to Jenson and the Brawn team.





» [Amiga] *Stunt Car Racer* brings a whole new meaning to 'crashing the game'.



» [BBC Micro] *Revs* was Crammond's first stab at the racing genre and broke new ground on the humble Micro.



YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for Geoff and he kindly visited our forum to answer those we didn't have time to ask. Check online if yours isn't here

Are you any good at driving a real racing car?
I have tried various 'experience' days at racing circuits, driving such things as a Peugeot saloon car, a Ferrari 355, a Porsche Cayman and a single-seater Formula Ford. When it comes to evaluating my skills, I will refer to my Peugeot saloon car experience at Silverstone that I did with an instructor in the car. When I was actually doing it, I found that because of my familiarity with driving the Silverstone circuit on the computer, I approached the whole thing very much like playing a computer game – that is to say I was slightly removed from reality. The subsequent instructor's report contained phrases such as 'speed merchant', which sort of sounds okay, but it also contained words like 'bull' and 'china shop'. The very next day I did my 'single-seater experience day', which surprisingly began with another Peugeot saloon car session. The instructors were different and didn't know I had already done it the previous day. I thought I would impress and so didn't tell this to my instructor; unfortunately this caused considerable panic as we approached the first bend at Copse, which is a high-speed corner. I was shouted at and threatened with an immediate return to the pits. So I guess I didn't impress!

Is there any game you've seen and thought, 'I wish I'd programmed that'?
Tetris.

Have you ever thought, 'I'm bored with driving games, so for my next game I would really like to make…'? Is that what happened with *The Sentinel*?
When I did *The Sentinel*, I had only done one driving game, *Revs*, so I didn't feel that I was connected to any particular genre. Later, when doing the *Grand Prix* series, I did have some other ideas, which I was too busy to develop and other people came out with. The *GP* project was huge and had a lot of momentum, with people in place, licence in place, publisher on board, and I wasn't about to walk away from it to develop other ideas.

Are you aware if any F1 drivers played *Grand Prix* back in the day?
I am aware that there were a few drivers who used *Grand Prix* to learn tracks. I still have a copy of a newspaper article that described how Mika Salo introduced *GP2* to Jacques Villeneuve during his first year in F1. These are some of my favourite quotes from the interview with Jacques after qualifying at Spa: "I've been using it for the last three Grands Prix"; "The circuits are so realistic, amazingly close to what they are really like, and so are the cars"; "I've been using it since Hockenheim, and within ten laps I felt at home. The same in Hungary". The reason this all made the news was that he got pole position at Spa.



Who's your favourite Doctor Who?
I find them all slightly irritating, to be honest. That's not to say I haven't watched it a lot.

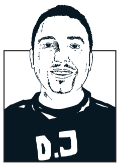
Did you work on any games that never saw the light of day?
Yes. I got into a habit of starting a project, working on it for three months, and then having a more compelling idea that I would do instead. With bills to pay and a low boredom threshold, I didn't like to stew for more than two or three weeks just trying to think of my next game idea, so I would get started on something with potential and then invariably be struck by a better idea at a random moment away from my computer.

BUBBLE GHOST

I'M FOREVER BLOWING BUBBLES



- **PUBLISHER:** INFOGRAMES
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI ST
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

We're not sure how Christophe Andreani came up with the equation ghost + bubble = massive win, but we're forever glad that he single-mindedly pushed his bizarre vision forward.

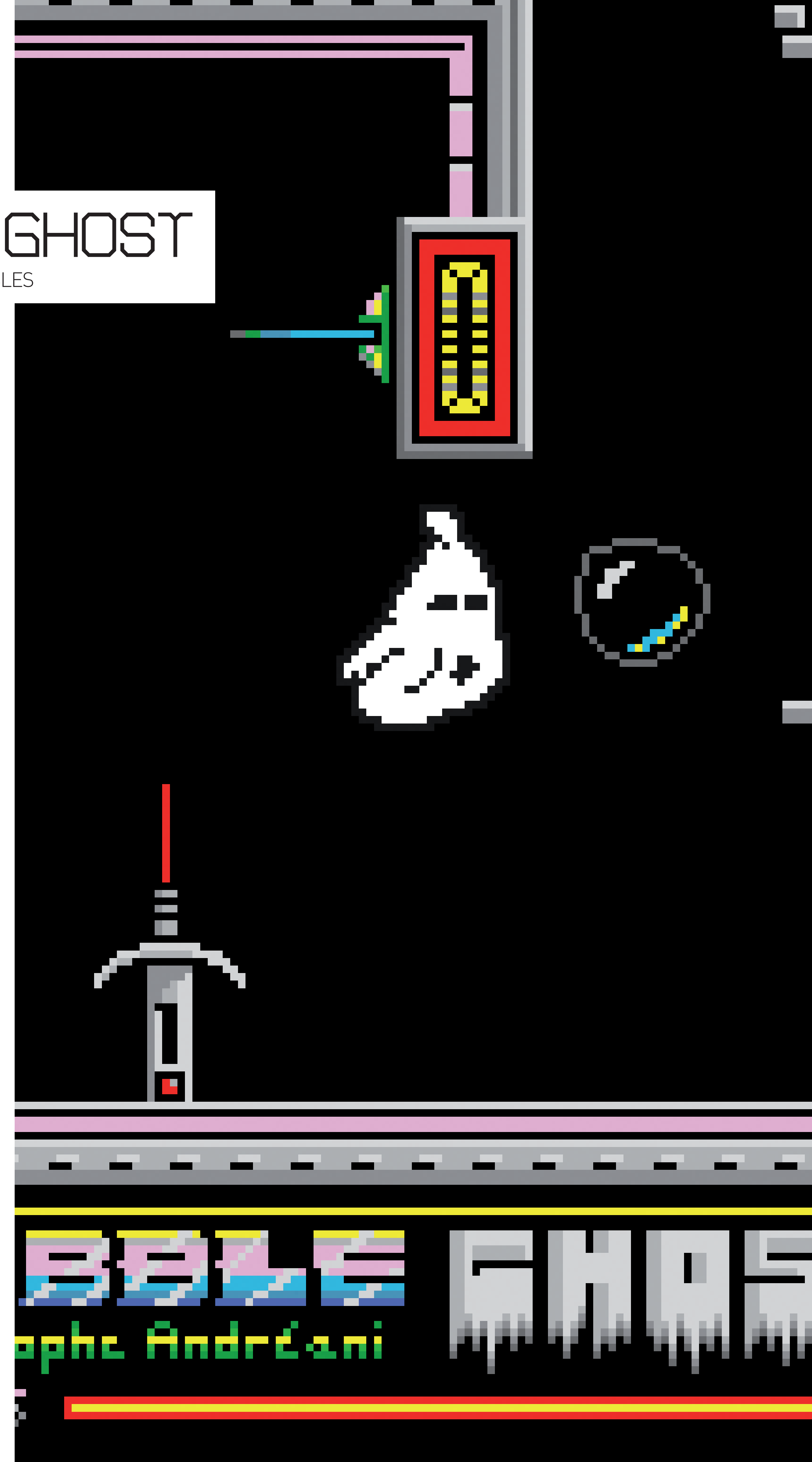
First designed for Atari's ST but eventually released on everything from the Apple IIGS to Nintendo's Game Boy, *Bubble Ghost*'s core concept is as simple as its lead character is charming.

Each single-level screen has a start and an exit, and you must guide a bubble to the latter without bursting it. Now, being incorporeal, your poor little ghost can't actually push the bubble himself, so he has to rely on his breath to shift the globe of liquid water. While there's an obvious flaw to this concept – ghosts are dead and therefore don't have breath – there's no denying that the concept itself is utterly compelling, and it should come as no surprise that it ended up being rather popular upon its release.

What is interesting, however, is that *Bubble Ghost* never received a sequel of any sort, which is a massive shame, because while Christophe's game could be difficult, it was rarely unfairly so. You'd initially be tasked with fairly straightforward levels, but as your ghost progressed, the obstacles he had to tackle became ever more dangerous.

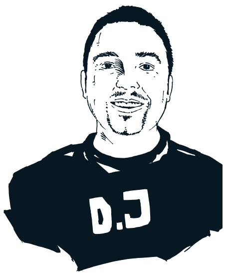
Candles could burst your precious bubble and fans would blow it off course, while even touching walls meant its demise. Add in a tight time limit and it shouldn't be too difficult to understand that certain levels of *Bubble Ghost* could become a tremendously frustrating experience. Luckily, the ST version and other 16-bit ports had mouse control, which made piloting your spectre and his precious load far easier than the 8-bit games.

Inevitably, though, you'd take a risk or blow your bubble too hard and it would burst in a shower of little pixels, only for your cute spectre to turn to the screen and sternly admonish you. Genius, and even now we find ourselves pining for a remake. Surely this would be perfect for Apple's iPhone?



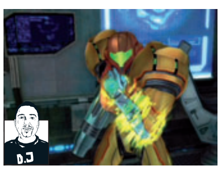

SCORE: 027050
HI-SCORE: 106800

RETRORATED



» Trials HD is awesome. It's basically Kickstart, but in glorious high-definition and with killer physics. Other delights this month include Nintendo's Metroid Prime Trilogy, Square's Final Fantasy spin-off Dissidia and the long-awaited return of Pilotwings...

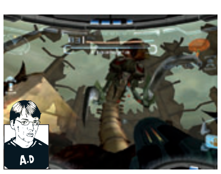
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Metroid Prime Trilogy
Wii controls make playing through the first two games a brand new experience.



STUART
Pilotwings
Playing through this again on the VC makes me realise how much I need a new version.

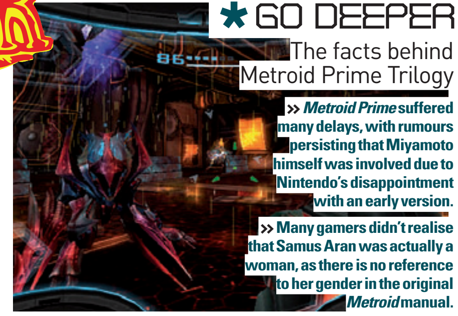


ASHLEY
Metroid Prime Trilogy
Three classic, and huge, games on one disc? You can't really go wrong, can you?

» METROID PRIME TRILOGY

Wii





✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Metroid Prime Trilogy

» ***Metroid Prime*** **suffered many delays, with rumours persisting that Miyamoto himself was involved due to Nintendo's disappointment with an early version.**

» **Many gamers didn't realise that Samus Aran was actually a woman, as there is no reference to her gender in the original** ***Metroid*** **manual.**

» ***Metroid Dread*** **was supposed to be a 2D adventure for the DS, but it has been in development hell for years.**



Metroid Prime Trilogy

NOW THIS IS HOW YOU DO A MAKEOVER

INFORMATION

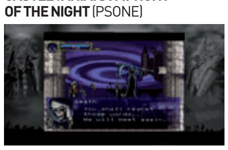
- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £39.99
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RETRO STUDIOS
- **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» First released on Nintendo's Famicom system in 1986, Samus Aran has gone on to become one of the company's best known characters. *Metroid Prime* marked the first new Samus adventure in eight years. Her latest Wii adventure is called *Metroid: Other M* and is due for release next year.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT (PSONE)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SHADOW COMPLEX (XBOX 360)





Metroid Prime Trilogy is utterly amazing. Yes, it's an opening statement that reeks of hyperbole, but the proof really is in the pudding. In addition to the brilliant yet woefully underrated third part of Retro Studios' excellent trilogy, Nintendo has also included the first two GameCube efforts, and boy, do they benefit from _Corruption_'s sublime controls.

Yes, selecting visors and weapons is initially tricky to get to grips with, but once it clicks, you'll find the first two games an absolute joy to play. Navigating through *Prime*'s beautiful worlds is a dream and combat feels fresh and exciting, while even Samus herself feels a little quicker than she did on the Cube. If you need further proof of how well *Corruption*'s controls work with the first two games then just wait until you revisit some of the more challenging boss battles. *Echoes*' Amorbis could be a right sod to battle on the Cube, but he's far easier to defeat now; in fact, *Echoes* is generally far easier than it originally was, although it remains the weakest part of the trilogy.

Graphically, things are pretty much the same as before. Both *Prime* and *Echoes* now feature widescreen support and the visuals appear to be that little bit clearer, but otherwise there's no real differences to speak of. Having said that, they were some of the finest-looking GameCube games anyway, so aside from a proper high-definition makeover it's hard to see how Nintendo could have improved on them.

In addition to the overhauled control system, the original two games also feature *Corruption*'s medal system, although they don't feel as well integrated as they did in the third *Prime* game. It's another nice touch, however, and shows just how much effort has gone into this exhaustive package.

OPINION



I was expecting big things with this *Prime* revamp and I haven't been disappointed. I could have done without the ropey achievements and *Echoes*' multiplayer is still rubbish, but this remains an excellent package of past hits, even if you still own the GameCube originals.

Stuart Hunt

If we wanted to nitpick we could moan about the dull presentation and inability to use your original saves or the original controls, but these are churlish niggles at best. Basically, if you love *Metroid*, this pack is essential.

In a nutshell

Yes, it's effectively the same three games as before, but don't let that put you off. This is a fantastic overhaul that even makes us love _Echoes_. An achievement if ever there was one.

» Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	90%
Sound	93%
Playability	94%
Addictivity	95%
Overall	**92%**

Wolfenstein

RAVEN GIVES AN UNIMAGINATIVE BJ (BLAZKOWICZ)

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC, PS3 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £49.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION » **DEVELOPER:** RAVEN SOFTWARE » **PLAYERS:** 1

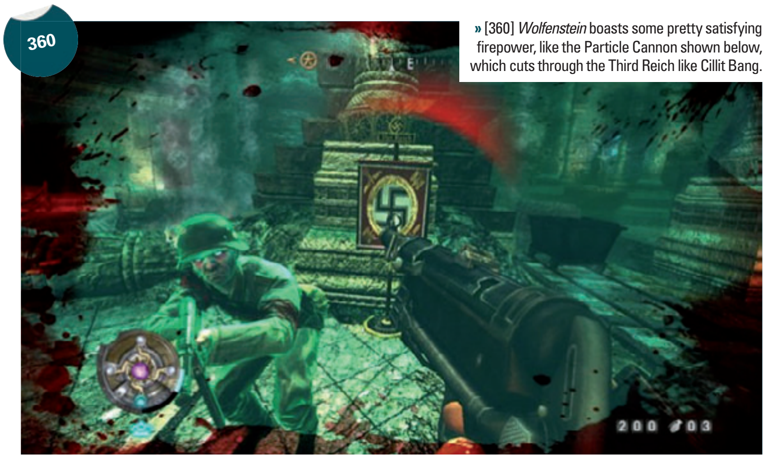
Pleasantly surprised is the best expression we can use to describe our impression of Raven's follow-up to *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. Existing in a saturated genre and chugging from an enhanced version of the *Doom 3* engine, it would be fair to say that we really didn't fancy *Wolfenstein*'s chances in the current FPS arena. And while it does nothing revolutionary, this update of id's Nazi-killing spree is nevertheless a solid FPS and better than a lot of the other fluff that finds its way onto retail shelves on a weekly basis.

What impressed us most about *Wolfenstein* was just how satisfying the game is, which is courtesy of a nice array of devastating weaponry and an endless army of Nazis to test them on. Add to this some nice cinematic set pieces and the ability to access an alternate world for enhanced agility, powers and the ability to see enemy weak spots and waypoints through levels, and you have the bones of a decent, if uninspired, fantastical shooter. Perhaps our biggest gripe is Raven's odd decision to centre the missions on an annoying central hub. As it gets topped up with enemies following the completion of each mission, it forces the player to fight their way to each new objective.

Overall, *Wolfenstein* is an enjoyable FPS that gets more right than it does wrong. If you're a fan of the series, and accept the fact that it's not looking to reinvent the wheel, you'll probably get quite a bit of enjoyment out of this latest update.

» Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	69%
Sound	70%
Playability	79%
Addictivity	70%
Overall	**71%**



» [360] *Wolfenstein* boasts some pretty satisfying firepower, like the Particle Cannon shown below, which cuts through the Third Reich like Cillit Bang.



OPINION

Wolfenstein doesn't do anything wrong, but it doesn't do anything great either. The Veil world and central hub are nice touches, but I was hoping for more. It's polished enough and the sound is brilliant, but I'll be sticking with the PSN version of the original.

Darran Jones



Tales Of Monkey Island Part 1

» **SYSTEM:** WiiWARE
» **PRICE:** 1,000 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **The first part** of Telltale's new *Monkey Island* is finally here. Sadly, despite an impressive PC offering, the WiiWare version falls short, with ropey controls, lengthy loads and a stuttering frame rate. It's a rushed port that puts you off the otherwise sparkling dialogue and charming characters. Get the cheaper PC offering.

» Score **61%**



Trials HD

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Take away the** glorious high-definition visuals and incredible physics and you're left with a truly stunning update of *Kickstart*. Simplistic controls, brilliantly designed tracks, a course editor and clever online implementation – you can instantly see how your friends are faring while you play – make *Trials HD* an essential purchase, even at its high price tag. Be warned, though: later levels get insanely tough.

» Score **91%**



Grunts

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** 59 PENCE » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Fans of *Cannon*** *Fodder* would do well to track this remarkable effort, as it's effectively the same game. Featuring an impressive array of levels and weapons with easy to use controls – simply swipe/touch where you need to go – this is an impressive little package that once again proves that Apple's machine is really becoming an essential purchase for the retro gamer on the go.

» Score **70%**



Pilotwings

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Play *Pilotwings* today** and it soon becomes clear just how lacking it is. On the other hand, it remains one of the most relaxing games to ever appear on Nintendo's 16-bit machine, and what its missions lack in longevity won't stop you from replaying them over and over again. Add in some wonderfully jaunty tunes and those still-impressive Mode 7 visuals and *Pilotwings* becomes another must-have download.

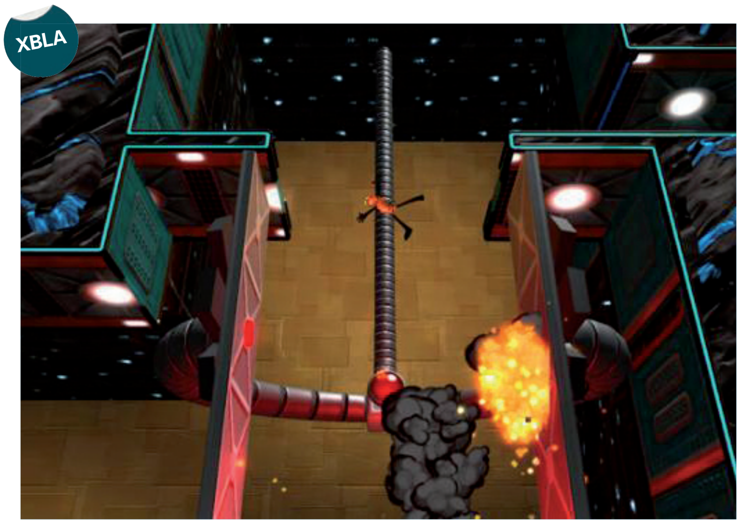
» Score **90%**

'Splosion Man

FEELING HOT, HOT, HOT

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBLA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT » **DEVELOPER:** TWISTED PIXEL » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

XBLA



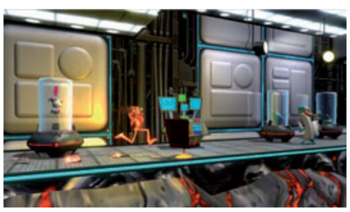
» [Live Arcade] *'Splosion Man* features tremendous animation that greatly adds to its overall humour.

D.J

Entering the platform market with a new character is tricky. For every Sonic or Mario that comes along, virtually dozens of bland new heroes fail to ignite interest with gamers and quickly slip into obscurity. We hope this same fate doesn't befall 'Splosion Man, as he's the most charming character we've met in years.

Whether he's simply running along full pelt with his arms outstretched and making aeroplane noises, or picking himself up after he's been hurled into a brick wall, Twisted Pixel's new creation is a wonderful character who immediately stands apart from many of his platforming peers.

Charm only gets you so far, though, and fortunately Twisted Pixel has created a belting platformer that's been brilliantly built around 'Splosion Man's one gimmick: his ability to explode. Explode 'Splosion Man and he'll be hurled into the air. Timed properly, this allows you to perform a triple jump, bounce off exploding barrels for even more height, or jump up walls, therefore reaching otherwise inaccessible areas.



It's a great gimmick that, along with the 50 fiendishly designed levels, the ability to play four-player co-op, and some truly inventive bosses, makes for one hell of a unique Xbox Live Arcade experience.

With its 2D viewpoint, cleverly constructed stages and reliance on perfectly executed jumps, *'Splosion Man* is as old-school as they come. Let's hope he performs well enough to earn a sequel.

OPINION

S.H

I was expecting another *Bubsy* or *Zool* effort here, so colour me surprised. Entertaining and original platformers come along all too rarely nowadays, so something as delightful as *'Splosion Man* proves unmissable. Oh, and just wait until you try out the mental co-op mode.

Stuart Hunt

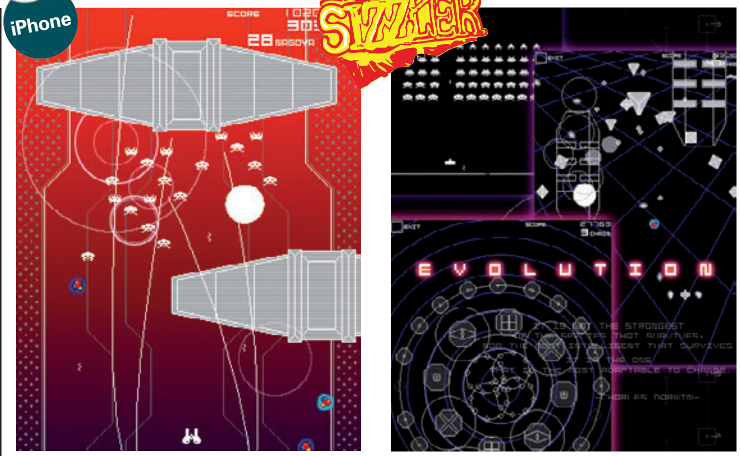
» Scores

Presentation	83%
Graphics	88%
Sound	80%
Playability	87%
Addictivity	84%

Overall 86%

iPhone

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» [iPhone] The further you get in *Infinity Gene*, the more the levels change. It's a great incentive for continued play.

Space Invaders Infinity Gene

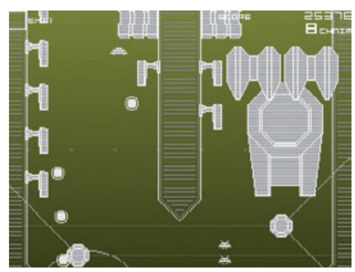
TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

D.J

To be honest, we'd have been perfectly happy for Taito to replicate *Space Invaders Extreme* on Apple's iPhone. As it is, the developer has instead created a brand new game that specifically caters to the format it's on, and the end result is a stunning shooter that takes the core *Space Invaders* and continually builds upon the original blueprint.

Indeed, *Infinity Gene* starts off with the original *Space Invaders* screen and simple left and right movement, but after a few hits the level transmogrifies into a totally different beast and you're free to move wherever your finger takes you. As each relatively short stage is finished, you'll be rewarded with numerous bonuses, ranging from new weapons to new graphical skins and bonus levels. It's a wonderful concept that spurs you on to complete each new stage, if only so you can see what the next one brings.



As with *Extreme*, music plays an important role in *Infinity Gene*, with explosions and shots tying in with the game's own funky tunes. It's even possible to import your own music, which generates a new level based on whatever you've chosen.

Ultimately, though, it's *Infinity Gene*'s simplistic, yet oh-so-addictive gameplay that makes it so much fun to play. Taito has created a fantastic blaster that's perfectly suited for Apple's machine. If you adore shooters then make sure you download this straight away. You won't regret it.

OPINION

S.H

Taito is really finding its feet on Apple's machine and has delivered another excellent update to a classic game. Fast and furious and with wonderful old-school visuals, it's a superb blaster that just keeps giving. Miss it at your peril because it's utterly fantastic.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

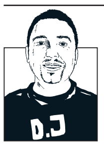
Presentation	87%
Graphics	80%
Sound	89%
Playability	96%
Addictivity	93%

Overall 91%

Drift Mania

IF SUPER SPRINT AND SUPER OFF ROAD HAD A BABY

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WiiWARE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** HUDSON » **PLAYERS:** 1-8



We've had our eyes on this attractive-looking racer ever since Konami announced it. Sadly, despite being pretty good fun, a number of annoyances stop us recommending *Drift Mania* for anything other than occasional drunken game sessions.

The biggest issue comes with the controls, which just aren't as accessible as you'd expect from an arcade-style game of this type. With the focus on drifting around bends it's all too easy to continue straight into a wall after taking a tough corner. It becomes easier with practice, but a game like this should let you jump in straight away.

It's a pity that *Drift Mania*'s controls are such a bugger to master, as there's a fair amount of enjoyment to be found in Konami's new racer if you dig deep enough. The main focus of the game is on multiplayer, and, as a result, there's a great range of options and unique modes to choose from. Meteor has you desperately dodging meteors as they smash into the track, Cold Potato has you racing towards a gigantic potato and then trying to keep hold of it for as long as possible as your opponents try to do the same, while Infected has one player racing around trying to infect everyone else. There's also VIP, which sees all available players divided into two teams and trying to protect their ringed car.

As fun as all the above are, average rival AI means that hardly any of the modes are much fun to play on your own, meaning that *Drift Mania* gets tired pretty quickly without a full complement of human players in on the action. What a shame.

» Scores

Presentation	75%
Graphics	72%
Sound	80%
Playability	65%
Addictivity	74%
Overall	**67%**

Wii



» [WiiWare] Hilarious fun with other players, *Drift Mania* really falls down as a solo experience.



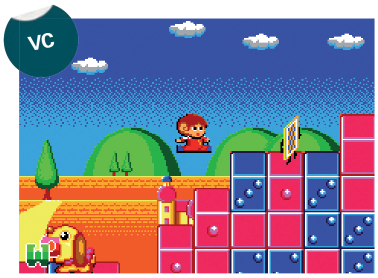
OPINION



This is amazing fun with multiple players, but there's just not really enough here to sustain a solo gamer. Having said that, we're more than happy for an improved sequel to come along at some point, providing it's more fun when playing on your tod.

Stuart Hunt

VC



Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** 500 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **After his superb** outing in *Miracle World*, this vehicle for Sega's original mascot is a major dud. His signature punch is nowhere to be seen, collision detection is ropey, and the level design is simply lazy. Worst of all, though, is the complete lack of challenge this drab platformer offers. Even hardcore *Alex* fans will be hard-pushed to enjoy this.

» Score **37%**

XBLA



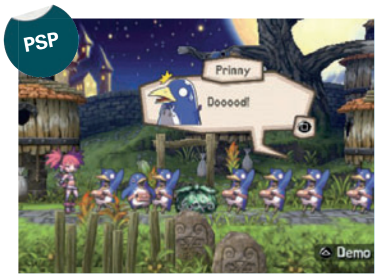
Worms 2: Armageddon

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **Now this is** more like it. Forget the iPhone effort reviewed last month and download this excellent release instead. There's a huge amount of customisation on offer, over 40 different weapons, and a proper campaign mode. Yes, this is more of the same, but it's the best version that's available on any current platform.

» Score **84%**

PSP



Prinny: Can I Really Be The Hero?

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» ***Prinny* is one** of the most beautiful games on the PSP. Gorgeous sprites, fantastic bosses and a hilarious story ensure that the presentation is impeccable. Sadly, gameplay isn't as strong and, despite clever touches, the clumsily designed levels, awkward controls and ridiculous difficulty make this a game for masochists only.

» Score **49%**

XBLA



Phantasy Star II

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 400 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **The RPG genre** has come a long way since *Phantasy Star II* was released. Yes, the graphics look shoddy nowadays, and yes, the combat is simplistic, but beneath all this there's still a great, very playable game. Epic in scale and with a range of interesting and diverse characters, *Phantasy Star II* still has what it takes to impress RPG fans. Newcomers will just have to persevere to find it, is all.

» Score **82%**

» DISSIDIA: FINAL FANTASY

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSP
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Final Fantasy* was conceived by Hironobu Sakaguchi and was Squaresoft's last roll of the dice, due to it being in huge financial trouble at the time. The NES game became a huge success, however, spawning 13 sequels so far, numerous remakes and spin-offs, and even two CGI animated feature films.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
BUSHIDO BLADE (PSONE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
VIRTUAL-ON MARZ (PS2)



✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Dissidia: Final Fantasy

» The Western version of *Dissidia* includes many improvements over the Japanese release, including a new arcade mode, a shorter tutorial and additional moves and cut-scenes.

» *Dissidia* is one of the few PSP games to offer a lengthy install. It eats up a lot of space but is definitely worth using.

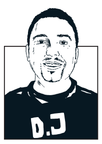
PSP



» [PSP] *Dissidia* is easily one of the best-looking games on the PSP. Special attacks look astoundingly good.

FINAL FANTASY AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE

Dissidia: Final Fantasy



If you're expecting a traditional beat-'em-up then prepare for disappointment, as *Dissidia* is a world away from your usual fighting game. Eager to make its crossover – 20 popular characters from the first ten games in the *Final Fantasy* series do battle against each other – stand apart from the crowd of brawlers that are now available, Square Enix has delivered a unique fighter that fans of the series are going to adore.

Indeed, *Dissidia*'s fan service is truly staggering; there are dream battles between some of the franchise's most popular characters, 8-bit sprites from earlier games, ethereally beautiful music, classic Summons to attack your opponents with, familiar items to buy and use, and much, much more. It's easily the best fan service we've seen in a videogame for years and is likely to bring back fond memories in even the most casual of gamers.

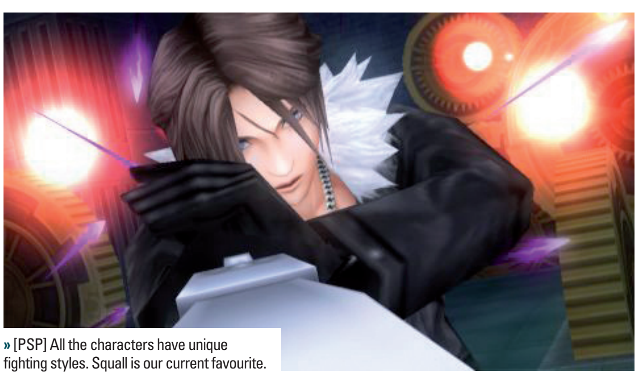
The battles themselves take place in huge arenas and have more in common with the likes of *Virtual On* and *WarTech* as opposed to more standard fighters like *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat*. Characters run up and down walls, ridiculously over-the-top Ex moves get unleashed – providing you've collected the relevant crystals – and dash attacks and the ability to lock on to your opponent mean that guerrilla-style tactics work far better than just trying to get stuck in.

As fun as *Dissidia*'s combat is, there are issues that stop Square Enix's game from achieving true greatness. No doubt wanting to play on its RPG roots, *Dissidia* contains a staggering array of options that can overwhelm the average player, creating a wall of stats and instructions that will no doubt blindside certain gamers. Characters can be levelled up to extraordinarily high levels and masses of items and moves can be purchased from a convenient shop, while it can take an age to fathom out the clever bravery system – brave attacks steal your opponent's bravery and add to your own, and once depleted, you start



dealing damage. Despite the seemingly impenetrable sea of options, *Dissidia* has been put together with such skill and grace that only the most uninterested of gamers will not want to start peeling away at the game's many layers.

It's certainly not the game we were expecting, but it's nevertheless an exciting, not to mention challenging, release that does both *Final Fantasy* and the PSP proud.



» [PSP] All the characters have unique fighting styles. Squall is our current favourite.

In a nutshell

An interesting and staggeringly complex fighter whose sheer attention to detail is the only thing that's likely to put some gamers off. Persevere, though, as it's great fun.

OPINION



I can't really get my head around this. Many battles feel down to random luck as opposed to any actual skill, and it took an age to work out *Dissidia*'s complex combat system – it's like Materia all over again. It certainly looks nice, though, and it's keeping Darran quiet, so that's one small mercy.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	96%
Graphics	96%
Sound	94%
Playability	85%
Addictivity	80%

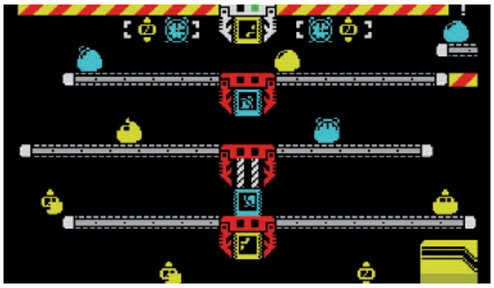
Overall 84%

HOMEBREW

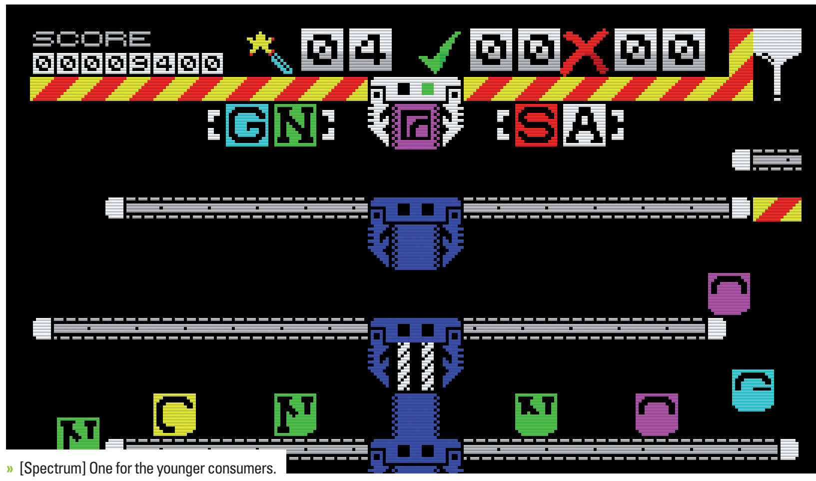
» The scene's latest news and reviews



There's a varied selection of manly pursuits available in homebrew form this month. We've got some gunplay, high-speed driving, battling the undead, working in a factory and… sudoku? It was going so well up until then… Never mind, because most of the games are going to be worth far more of your attention than this appalling attempt at making them sound dramatic!



» [Spectrum] Weirdest fast food promotion ever!



» [Spectrum] One for the younger consumers.



» [Spectrum] Almost looks good enough to eat…



YOU CAN ALWAYS TURN THE GOODS OUT

FACTORY DAZE



FORMAT: SPECTRUM
DEVELOPED BY: BOB SMITH
LINK: WWW.BOBS-STUFF.CO.UK
RELEASE DATE: 2009
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Retro gamers get all the glamorous jobs. Over the years we've played at being plumbers, dustmen, posties and waiters, all without a pay cheque to show for it! *Factory Daze* takes simulating the glittering lifestyle of manual labour a few steps further: not only is it about working in a factory but the production line, responsible for churning out toys included with the output from assorted fast food chains. It's been automated, featuring an arrangement of four conveyor belts that feed the raw materials through a series of hydraulic presses and, rather than crushing cybernetic assassins, these are used to knock the toys into the correct shape.

The four stages of the process take care of the various corners of each toy, and a glob of coloured material that is fed in at one end arrives at the other as a fully formed, delightful plaything, which is then unceremoniously dumped into the back of a delivery van before being shipped off. And since the economy isn't particularly healthy at the moment, people's eating habits are equally at the less wholesome end of the scale, and the business of providing cheap food is booming, meaning that the demand is higher than ever and the factory's machines are being run at full capacity… and they're not entirely able to cope. In fact, the hardware is starting to go haywire and the machines are beginning to make things up as they go along!

Enter the player as a night shift worker who must take charge and make sure the presses continue to stamp out the right part of each item. To begin with, that means manipulating just the one press and making sure that it's ready to work on whatever is approaching on the conveyor, but as this nightmarish shift proceeds, the machines that need attention will change, the speed at which material is dropped onto the production line alters, and the customer's orders will become ever more demanding for each batch of toys. Although nobody has called in the maintenance staff for some emergency repairs, the player is handed five 'wizards' at the start of play, and these little darlings can be waved over one of the rogue machines to magically repair it for the current shift. Since they only come in limited numbers, though, it's best to reserve them for the more panic-inducing production runs.

Factory Daze is almost worryingly cute. The in-game music is cheerful to a degree that could get a job presenting children's television, and the little toys working their way through the production process include delightful robots of various descriptions, floppy disks, *Space Invaders*-inspired aliens, assorted kitchen utensils, and even the fast food itself – or at least plastic copies, and we'll avoid the obvious jokes about nutritional content. That, combined with the varying of which presses need to be manually operated and the changing speed that the materials are doled out, means that each level has a noticeably different challenge and the game avoids becoming repetitive.

92%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

GHOST N ZOMBIES

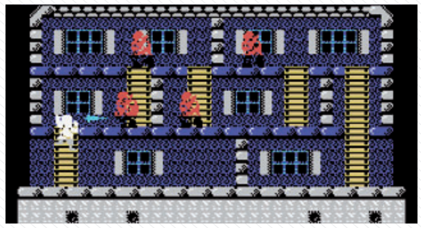
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

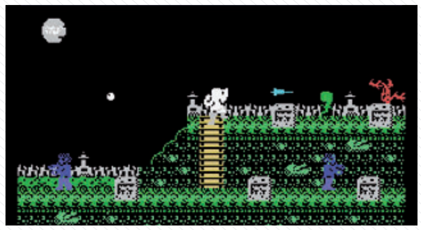
» **FORMAT:** COLECOVISION » **DEVELOPER:** JEAN-PHILIPPE MEOLA
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.COLECOVISION.DK/COLL-ZOMBIES.HTM » **PRICE:** $60

Before we even get started, the name pretty much gives things away here. But while it's something of an homage to *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, *Ghost N Zombies* isn't a direct conversion. Instead, the developer has tried to capture the spirit of the original in a form that the Colecovision hardware can handle well, which has included taking the brave design choice of switching the action from scrolling to flick-screen and having those screens representing key points within the original game.

Considering the price tag, *Ghost N Zombies* does come across as a somewhat short game, since it contains just three levels and relies on a combination of strict time limits and respawning the player at the start of a stage on death to prevent them wading through the entire thing too quickly. But regardless of that high difficulty level, it isn't impossible and can be completed after some entertaining, if frustrating, practice.

81%





» [Colecovision] This looks a bit familiar!

H3×0R

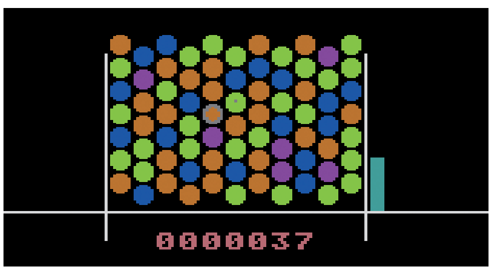
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

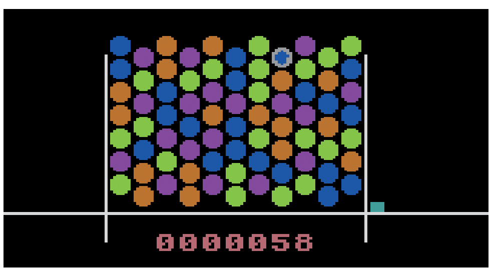
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** MARTIN SIMECEK
» **DOWNLOAD:** MATOSIMI.ATARI.ORG » **PRICE:** FREE

***h3×0r* is a** 'match four'-style puzzle game where balls of the same colour must be arranged into lines of four or more so that they're removed from play. As usual, there's a timer counting down in the background. Every successful removal of a group of spheres resets the thing, and letting it run out ends the game. *Bejeweled* variants like these are commonplace in homebrew circles at the moment, but what makes this stand out from others is that the whole game's been squished into 1K for the annual Minigame competition.

It's fair to say that *h3×0r* is very simple – it's possibly slightly more simple than its name is proving to type, in fact – but for all that stripping back it still retains a lump of the playability. A meatier version with more detailed graphics, a soundtrack and preferably a properly balanced difficulty curve and distinct levels would have scored much higher, but as a diversion this tiny little game – in every sense – is still fairly entertaining.

59%





» [Atari 8-bit] Twistin' the night away

SUDOKU MASTER

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

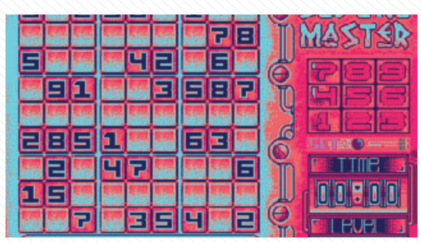
» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** BINARY SCIENCES
» **DOWNLOAD:** BINARYSCIENCES.COM » **PRICE:** 6 EUROS

Sudoku: the ancient art of number arranging. For Outer Mongolian cave dwellers, sudoku puzzles are deceptively simple, featuring a nine-by-nine square grid with numbers already placed in some of the squares. The objective is to fill the remaining spaces, only using the numbers from one to nine and making sure that each row, column and the nine three-by-three square areas that make up the grid all contain only one instance of each number.

Computer-based versions are fairly common, even for the 8-bits, and we've previously looked at a remarkably good rendition for the Amstrad available from Cronosoft back in issue 57. While *Sudoku Master* is visually more impressive, it lacks a considerable number of options in comparison to Kevin Thacker's version, including those that simplify the game for beginners and the ability to solve squares using the program, meaning that this should be considered more for intermediate players.

81%





» [Amstrad CPC] Puzzles are either pre-designed or random.

WHAT'S BREWING?

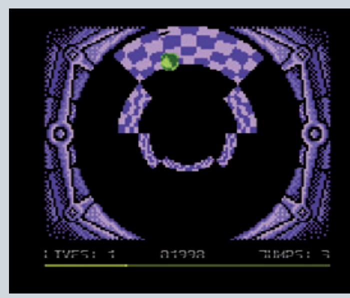
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [C64] Draw, pardner.

How the West was won

Although at the time of writing the diary on its official website hasn't been updated to reflect the progress, we're reliably informed that Jon Wells' long-awaited C64 conversion of Firebird's Spectrum Wild West extravaganza *The Wild Bunch* is nearing completion. Jon has been working on converting it for quite a while, so it's truly a labour of love, which is reflected in the detail shown in various screenshots at **www.gamesplaygames.co.uk/thewildbunch/**



» [Atari 8-bit] *Yoomp!*, a previous ABBUC winner.

How the contest was won

ABBUC (the Atari Bit Byter User Club) has just finished accepting entries into its annual software competition. In previous years this event has seen some impressive Atari 8-bit games released such as *Animal Party* and *Yoomp!*, so hopefully we'll see something equally enjoyable when the results and then releases filter through to the Atari community at large. In the meantime, ABBUC's German-language website can be found over at **www.abbuc.de**.

How Scramble will hopefully be won

Take a classic game like Konami's *Scramble*, write a revised version for an 8-bit machine, give the whole thing a serious cosmetic makeover and, as long as that all-important playability is retained, the results could be something rather special. Certainly that's the hope with the recently announced C64 project *Scramble 2010*, and, if the preview version released back in August is anything to go by, at the very least it'll look utterly stunning.

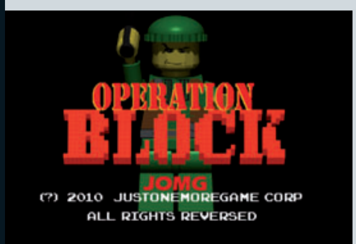
WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» Play on…

Following on from the coverage of *Operation Wolf* in issue 67, **Retro Gamer** freelancer Gabe McGrath has decided to restart development of his Lego-themed homage, *Operation Block*. The remake is planned to feature all of the levels and enemies from the original, lovingly recreated in branded plastic pieces.

Originally destined for the 2006 Retro Remakes competition before a few years of unexpected 'rest', *Operation Block* is back on track so, along with some renders of buildings and enemies to have an early peek at, readers can follow its development at **justonemoregame.wordpress.com**.



» [PC] All in all you're just another…

» Is everybody happy?

Since we've something of a '**Retro Gamer** writer making a game' trend this time, let's quickly mention another small production from Jason Kelk. Written partly because he'd never attempted an arena-based shoot-'em-up previously, *Happy Ball Is Happy* features a plethora of smiling faces, all of which must be destroyed, including the large mother smiley that bounces around and spawns new attackers. *Happy Ball Is Happy* is downloadable from **illogistix.info**.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on ***Retro Gamer*'s** Flash game of the month. This month we look at ***Cube Colossus.***

THE GUNS IN *Cube Colossus* lock on to enemies, but hitting something requires the player to aim ahead using the fine-tuning controls. Add to that a large number of weapon upgrades and a back story involving a twin searching for her missing sister and it's easy to become engrossed. Play it at: **www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/507205**

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



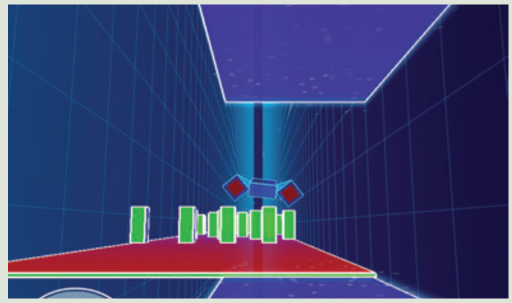
SLIDEWAYZ

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.YOYOGAMES.COM/GAMES/LAUNCH/92088



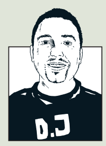
This is possibly one of the hardest reviews I've ever written, not because the game is difficult to categorise but, since part of the task at hand is figuring out what you're actually meant to do, I don't want to give the game away. The screen is filled with a maze, which rotates 90 degrees clockwise or anticlockwise with a tap of the cursor keys, and that in turn can be used to guide three coloured rings around.

Of course, interpreting what is meant to be done with those rings is part of the game, so it has to be noted that, when fathomed out, *Slidewayz* is something of a one-trick pony but still an amusing diversion that will require some dexterity to properly complete.



TASTY STATIC

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.TASTYSTATIC.COM



Based on a DOS game called *Skyroads*, *Tasty Static* is probably best described as a futuristic 3D racer. The player controls a ship zooming through brightly coloured, semi-transparent landscapes, leaping from solid area to solid area while avoiding fatal surfaces and plunging into oblivion. It may sound great, but the problem is that *Tasty Static* rapidly becomes frustratingly difficult.

After the first four or five courses, the levels become significantly harder to the point where the sixth expects players to be accelerating from the start or they'll immediately die. In past reviews I've described games as needing some practice to get into properly, but unfortunately the sheer amount of trial and error required to learn *Tasty Static* takes that need too far.

Remake of the Month





» [PC] Remember to yell as you blow stuff up!

RAMBO

» **DOWNLOAD:** RETROREMAKES.COM/FORUM/INDEX.PHP/TOPIC,882.0.HTML



John Rambo has returned to Vietnam… No wonder the poor chap gets so many flashbacks – he seems to have spent most of his adult life there and the rest trying to forget about it! As with the 8-bit originals of *Rambo*, the mission is to enter the prisoner of war camp, free Johnny's old friend, 'borrow' the helicopter, rescue the captives and leg it for the safety of Thailand while fending off the enemies and blowing apart everything else in the way.

This is pretty classy stuff as remakes go, and although *Rambo* looks a tad camp as he wanders around the… camp, the graphics are otherwise pleasing and the audio – a mixture of atmospheric effects and background noises combined with snippets of soundtrack – is more than reasonable. It isn't perfect since there are a few hiccups in the collisions, and landing the helicopter can be exasperating since it doesn't cast a shadow, so positioning ends up being luck rather than judgement.

But it's easy to forgive it those issues for one simple reason: when flying the helicopter, it's extraordinary fun being able to hammer around and decimate the landscape with the rocket launcher. Oh, and saving interned soldiers. That's quite entertaining as well…







» **Above:** Getting a high score on *AMOSteroids* (Amiga).
» **Top Right:** The venue for Console Combat.

CONSOLE COMBAT SPECIAL REPORT

A GROUP OF RETRO GAMERS WALK INTO A BAR… NOT THE START OF A BAD JOKE, AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, BUT RATHER A WEEKEND OF CODE, COMPETITION AND CLASSIC GAMES IN MANCHESTER

Over the weekend of 25 to 26 July 2009, a gathering of retro gamers and other interested parties called Console Combat was held in Manchester. As the name might suggest, the overall theme of the event was games and getting to play them, preferably against other people. The venue was the Lass-O'-Gowrie, which already has something of a pedigree since it has an evening a month set aside for gatherings of retro gamers and, along with its selection of cocktail cabinet and upright arcade machines that are brought out for such occasions, the bar is bedecked with retro goodness that includes some framed prints of classic game artwork on the walls and, while waiting for a pint to be poured, patrons find themselves being watched over from behind the bar by, among other things, a series of *Doctor Who* figures and a Big Trak.

On entering the bar, it was hard to miss the collection of consoles, including a Mega Drive, PC-Engine and Amiga CD32, all set up with games loaded and ready to play. The main gaming event of Console Combat was on the Saturday afternoon, the Battle of the 8-bits, where teams representing various 8-bit consoles and computers were fielded in a probably misguided attempt to finally decide which machine was best. Each faction had nominated a game for their platform and had also selected a 'joker' on another that they felt confident of scoring well with, and points were awarded based on how each team did on games like the C64 version of *Mega Apocalypse*, *Marble Madness* for the NES, and the BBC homebrew blaster *Zap!* After the hostilities drew to a close, the overall winner was Team C64, with the BBC representatives – including one slightly bemused homebrew reviewer who was roped in at the last moment – coming a respectable second, just ahead of the Master System posse. Bottom of the league was, in case anybody's wondering, the Spectrum team.

Of course, this did absolutely nothing to cease the larger, 25-year-old hostilities between fans of the various platforms, so I'm afraid we'll still be arguing the question of which machine is best for a while to come. Still, we can't blame the organisers for trying. During the Saturday evening, more teams were assembled for the most unbelievably geeky pub quiz ever held in a public place, and, unsurprisingly, it cleared the bar of everybody who'd wandered in without realising that a gaming event was on.





» **Above:** Getting down to some gaming.

Along with all of this merriment, there was something of an event within the event: the Homebrew Coding Geekend was organised by Acorn fanatics Retro Soft with the intention being to collect together a group of homebrew programmers, put them in a room together, and retire to a safe distance in order to discover what would happen next. Things didn't go exactly to plan in the end and the room was swapped out for a pleasant balcony that overlooked the river, but the various developers took the chance to demonstrate some of the things they were working on, including new projects currently in development for the C64, Atari 8-bits and BBC Micro and a surprisingly large selection of recently completed games for those machines and others.

These demonstrations included a BBC Master that was playing Commodore 64 music with the aid of a SID chip connected to it – the photograph doesn't do justice to the rather Heath Robinson-esque arrangement, which involved a ribbon cable snaking out from under the machine and disappearing into a black box containing the sound chip – with a vertical shoot-'em-up that utilises the SID expansion for in-game music, and a neat-looking platformer with an underwater theme for the C64 called *Aquarius*, which was originally written 20 years ago and remained unseen until now.

Speaking as a coder and an advocate of homebrew generally, it really was wonderful to see so many other developers in one place, and even more so to get a chance to try a few previews of what they're working on and witness the enthusiasm as they discussed techniques and ideas over a drink. If all goes to plan, there will be further outings for the Coding Geekend in the future.

At the end of the two days, Console Combat was all about the games. There weren't any big-name celebrities present – okay, Sonic turned up for a while, but as gaming personalities go he's one of the least likely to take part in an interesting question and answer session – and everybody there took advantage of the various consoles and computers around the pub, enjoyed the company of fellow retro gamers, put some faces to names they knew from the various internet forums including the **Retro Gamer** one, and occasionally made themselves look rather silly while playing *Rock Band*.

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Darran's hunting for some console collections.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



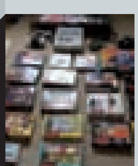
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



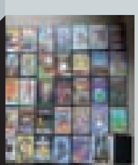
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

eBAY BARGAINS

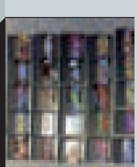
Retro Gamer has been scouring the world's most popular auction site to find the best bargains out there…



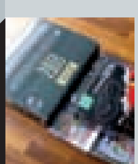
■ SNES Collection
Nintendo's SNES has always been a popular console to collect for, so we weren't surprised when this lot went for £149.59.



■ Spectrum Collection
600 Spectrum games for under £75? That sounds like an impressive bargain to us. You can't argue at barely a penny a game.



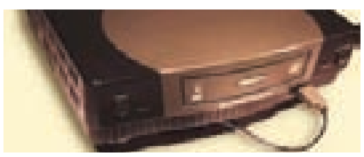
■ Lynx Collection
There are no boxes, but that didn't stop 15 bids from pushing this collection of Lynx games to £63.89. There are some greats here.



■ Neo Geo Collection
Neo Geos appear to be on the rise again, and this £215 bundle is pretty damn good. Six great games, full 60Hz and a second stick.

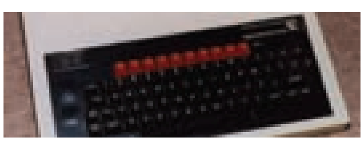
3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)



COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)



FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)



MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
COLECOVISION	£30 ($55)
DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

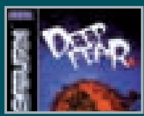
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

NEC

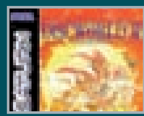
PC-6###	£10+ ($18+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest, hardware or software that caught our eyes. This month Darran's weeping over the Saturn games he's missing out on.



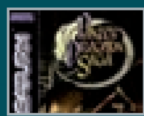
DEEP FEAR
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£65.90**



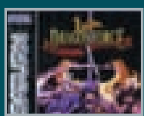
DISCWORLD II
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£27**
Ended at **£42.34**



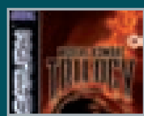
ATLANTIS
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£35**
Ended at **£19.56**



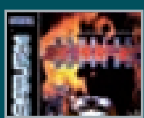
PANZER DRAGOON SAGA
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£100**
Ended at **£71.99**



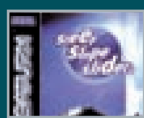
DRAGON FORCE
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£45**
Ended at **£62.43**



MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£150**
Ended at **No Sale**



BURNING RANGERS
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£35**
Ended at **£14.98**



STEEP SLOPE SLIDERS
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£6.45**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**



AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**

SINCLAIR

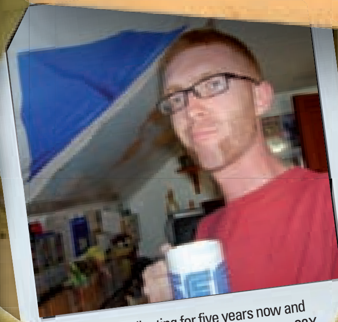
ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH WE SPEAK TO GARY BROWN FROM GLASGOW, AN AVID COLLECTOR OF ALL THINGS SEGA



» I've been collecting for five years now and have specialised in PAL Mega Drive, 32X, Mega-CD and Game Gear.



» The pride and joy of my collection: my almost complete PAL Mega Drive set of later release blue box games. The two spaces are for *Pier Solar* once it comes out and *World Championship Soccer 2*, whenever I finally track a copy down! Five years so far… only seen two!



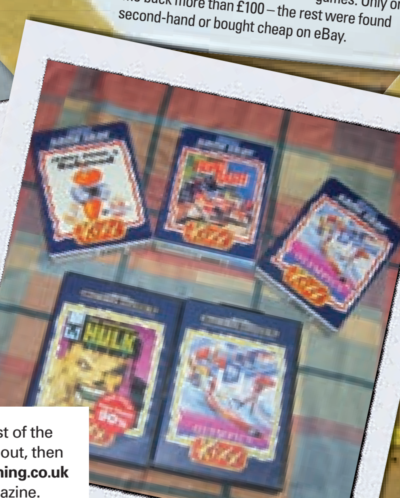
» Almost complete set of Australian variants of some of the many sports games on the Mega Drive.



» The second half of the rarer Mega-CD games. Only one set me back more than £100 – the rest were found second-hand or bought cheap on eBay.



» Some of my rarer Game Gear games from my Euro Game Gear set. A couple of these are pretty hard to find, such as *Galaga 2*, for which I owe a fellow gamer for selling to me.



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

Hi Retro Gamer,
I'm one of those 30-somethings who longs for the good old days. I spent most of my early life in the arcade at Lee-on-Solent in Hampshire. My kids don't understand what it was like when I tell them that every week there would be a brand new videogame and for what felt like years, every one was an original idea. There is nothing like having a crowd around you when you smash the high score in your local establishment.

Do you know if there are any plans to bring further Amiga classics to the iPhone/Touch. Games I have in mind are *Magic Pockets* and *Bob's Bad Day*, which I think will be perfect for the platform. Not sure if it's a classic, but *Bill's Tomato Game* is a puzzler I remember fondly too. As well as the above, I think the iPhone would easily handle *Midwinter*, one of my favourite strategy games of the time. Cheers.
Paul Knipe, Wallington, Surrey

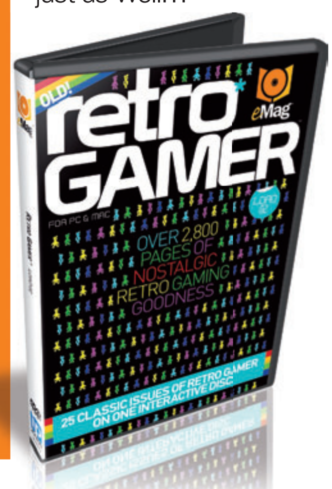


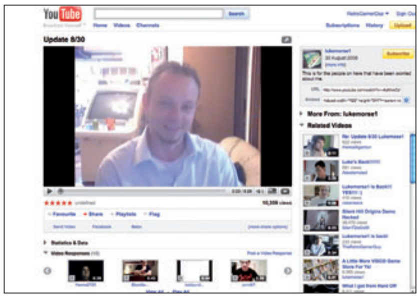
» Paul Knipe is not alone when he says he'd love to see some Amiga classics return on iPhone.

Thanks for your letter, Paul. We felt it was a great summation of what was so brilliant about playing games in the mid- to late-Eighties, which is why you've been awarded this month's Star Letter. There are plenty of Amiga ports on the iPhone, but not the ones you've actually mentioned. However, Manomio has just released a Commodore 64 emulator on the platform. It can be picked up for £2.99 with the games *Dragon's Den, Le Mans, Jupiter Lander, Arctic Shipwreck* and *Jack Attack*. So we guess there's a better-than-zilch possibility that a few Amiga classics could eventually find their way to the popular new handheld. And yes, *Midwinter* would be brilliant.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…





» Luke Morse makes a controversial return to YouTube, pleasing some, upsetting others.

NO REMORSE

Dear Retro Gamer,
I read last month's editorial about Luke Morse with great interest. I've been following Luke's channel for many months now, but when he put that so-called 'final' video up, I knew what it was about before he even started talking.

You can see the sort of trouble this man was getting into long before it happened, so I find it somewhat amazing that he's been receiving so much support on the internet. The guy is a complete idiot, and incredibly selfish and in no way deserved the space you gave him last issue. Anyone who blows over $800 on Laserdiscs and then casually mentions that he needs to work out how he's going to pay for his young son's hospital bills deserves a good slap around the face and not the support of deluded subscribers.

I'll admit that he was a great personality on YouTube and I for one enjoyed his in-depth articles and his constant (and some might say foolish) need to support his many subscribers, but when a person starts putting their hobby over and above their nearest and dearest, they won't be getting my sympathy.
Ben Turner, Blackpool

Sorry, Ben, but we're really going to have to disagree with you here. Luke may not have handled things as well as he could have, but at least he was man enough to admit to his mistakes and was attempting to move on with his life. If you don't like his return then whatever you do don't look at page 64. You're liable to get very angry.

FORUM LOVE

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to drop a line and say how much I've been enjoying your new Let's All Play feature. I've been delighted with the choices so far, but would love to make my own recommendations for future games. I love hearing about everyone's thoughts on games that I, too, used to love in the day, but I have an idea for how you could make the section even better. Why not use Let's All Play to resurrect Retro Shamer, which has been absent now for far too long. I'm sure plenty of readers would love to get together to share their hatred for games like *Bionic Granny*, *World Cup Carnival* or *James Bond Jr.* Imagine the fun you could have with it.
James King, via email

First off, we're glad you're enjoying the new article, it was put together as a bit of fun and to let the readers interact with



» [Spectrum] Remember when we used to collectively chide titles like *World Cup Carnival*. It was a crappy game of football, but at least the pitch invasions were cool.



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Next Month: Peter Molyneux



>> BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check into hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

the magazine more, which some appear to be doing. You're not the only person to mention a Let's All Play/Retro Shamer crossover, as one of our forum members – hello, Timothy – has been very vocal about it as well. You'll just have to wait and see what happens.

ANTIQUES ROADSHOW

Can you help? My mother-in-law has dug out my husband's Acetronic plus five games, including *Space Invaders* and *Cowboy*, all with the original boxes and so on. I was just wondering if it might be worth anything? We think it's about 30 years old.
Cheers
Kim Jones, email

We wouldn't ring your insurance company just yet, Kim. We've done a little digging and sadly your Acetronic, while a nice find, isn't going to make you an awful lot of money. While Acetronics don't crop up on eBay that often, they usually fetch somewhere in the region of between £15 and £25, and the boxed games tend to fetch around £5.



>> Kim wants to know if her Acetronic is valuable enough to sell up and to retire to Marbella. Short answer: no, sorry.

I HEART COIN-OP CAPERS

Hi guys,
I'm just writing to say how much I enjoyed the *Operation Wolf* feature in issue 67. It's one of my favourite games and the new Coin-op Capers feature you introduced did it justice brilliantly. Please, please, please can you make sure these features appear regularly in the magazine. And if you're taking requests, I would love to see *Double Dragon*, *After Burner*, *Time Crisis* and *Prop Cycle* receive the Coin-op Capers treatment in the future issues.
Cheers, guys.
Chris, email

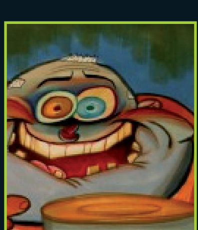
Hi Chris, we're really pleased with the response to the coin-op feature. Everyone seems to dig what we've tried to achieve with the article. Rest assured we've plenty more in the pipeline (if we can tie all the various elements of the feature together that is), but we're keeping schtum as to which games will be appearing at the moment. We like to surprise you guys. In this issue, however, if you flick back to page 68 you'll find eight pages dedicated to Sega's wondrous *Space Harrier*, so we hope you're a fan and enjoy the feature.

> "Why not use Let's All Play to resurrect Retro Shamer, which has been absent now for far too long"

TOP OF THE POPS

Dear Retro Gamer,
What on earth happened to your top 25s? Much of **Retro Gamer**'s content is fairly dense reading and the top 25s used to break these articles up nicely. It's always nice to get a general feeling of the team's favourite games and I was really looking forward to the proposed top 25 shoot-'em-ups that was supposed to be appearing in the magazine many issues ago now. Will they ever return?
Barry Kipps, via email >>

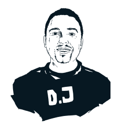
RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Steve Halfpenny
Joined:	17 August 2009
Location:	Stockton-on-Tees
Occupation:	Bit of this and that
Website:	http://none at the mo
Fave Games System:	Sega Dreamcast

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: MARS MATRIX
Why I picked it: Even if you're rubbish you'll get a great score.
Handy advice: Use your shield only when absolutely necessary. Trust me, it works wonders.



High Score: 444,276,800



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: SPACE HARRIER
Why I picked it: I'm writing about it for Coin-op Capers, so I thought I'd try to beat Nick's high score. I failed.
Handy advice: Try and keep off the ground. The lower section of the screen is the most hectic.

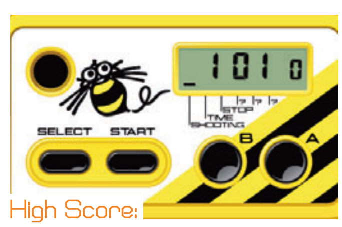


High Score: 7,172,500



ASH

CHOSEN GAME: HUDSON SHOT WATCH
Why I picked it: Because this rapid-fire test is surely the purest measure of a gamer's skill.
Handy advice: Use one finger (stiff) and use your forearm muscles to tap like a power drill.



High Score: 101 shots in 10 seconds

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's your favourite Sega arcade game?

Forum ID: Sir Arthur
Without a shadow of a doubt, it has to be the original *Wonder Boy*. I've loved this game since I saw it for the first time as a 12 year old in 1987 in the Yeti arcade, Tossa De Mar, Spain. It's remained one of my favourite score-attack games along with *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. Love the colour, music, sound effects and gameplay.

Forum ID: harlegu1n
OutRun all the way as it was even available in a god-forsaken underdeveloped country like Ecuador. The only racing game I've ever loved.

Forum ID: StarshipUK
OutRun the sit-down version. Living in Southend, my parents occasionally took me down the seafront, which was full of arcades. I remember there was a sit-down cabinet marked as 30p a go, but the machine only actually charged 20p a go. I'm not sure if the arcade knew this, but I played *OutRun* the most in that arcade as a result.

Forum ID: jamie_morgan
Shinobi for me. I've lost count of how many times I played this game in the arcades. Those were the days, people – they don't make games like this any more.

Forum ID: dubchaser
After Burner rotating cabinet. The first arcade game that truly amazed me as a kid.

Forum ID: shifter
Enduro Racer for me. Not the sit-down version though, I preferred the stand-up unit. It was a great game and I was into Moto X at the time so it fitted me perfectly.

Forum ID: RB
Space Harrier because I've got one. Closely followed by *OutRun*...

Forum ID: Cafeman
This question is impossible to answer. It's like being asked which of your children is your favourite.

Forum ID: thl
I'm going for *Space Harrier*. The immersive graphics get you sucked to the screen for ages thanks to that incredible frame rate. I also heard the voice 'Welcome to the Fantasy Zone. Get ready'. for the first time, which indicates that I'm prepared to wipe out those creatures no matter if it's the two-headed hydras, one-eyed mammoths or robots with odd names.

Forum ID: SirClive
OutRun by a mile. Sitting in the deluxe cab, swaying from side to side as you brush the seashore. *Magical Sound Shower* blaring from the speakers. *OutRun* in a deluxe cab is as close to the perfect arcade game as anyone has ever come.

Forum ID: richyrich
OutRun 2 is clearly the best game, but for a young pup fortunate to grow up near the arcades of Southend, the full hydraulic *Space Harrier* still has a special place. They only got rid of it recently, seven credits for £1. Bliss. I never completed it though. Scrap that. It's the original *OutRun*, all the way. *Magical Sound Shower*, hydraulics, game that lasted longer than a minute.

Forum ID: Flat Eric
Easiest answer in the world: *Scud Race* aka *Sega Super GT*. This is the best arcade racer ever created. After a long period of triple-A racers (*Virtua Racing*, *Daytona USA* and *Sega Rally*), *Scud Race* is the edge of arcade racing, or some say the ultimate arcade experience for arcade enthusiasts. The four-player cabinet was perfect. It's a shame we could only get a 'simplified' version over *OutRun 2*. Second to *Scud Race* is of course *Daytona 2*.

Forum ID: Timothy Lumsden
Going to plump for... *Out... After...* God this hard. Sod it. *Space Harrier*, but only because it has dragons in it.

Forum ID: Dizrythmia
Golden Axe. I remember the dwarf Gillius Thunderhead used an axe that was gold in colour. I only read the story years later and always thought his axe was the 'golden' one from the title.

Forum ID: batman877
Although *Out Run* is the better game, I've always preferred the charm of the bike handlebars on the *Enduro Racer* cabinet. It's a highly underrated coin-op that has never been given a decent home conversion.

Forum ID: thevulture
House Of The Dead. Guns, gore, zombies, chainsaws. Loved this game.

Forum ID: gman72
Go to the exit! *Alien Syndrome* for me. The booming voice from the arcade cabinet mesmerised me as a young lad.

Forum ID: Smurph
Little-known awesome-fest *AB Cop* hoovered my money from my pockets many moons ago.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

BEST POWER-UP

bonerlaw Mushroom? Racoon Suit? Three-way gun? Basically what's your favourite power-up?

woody.cool The 'super meter' in the lower left- and right-hand corners of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. There's nothing like creaming your opponent with a super move.

SexyWayne The windscreen wiper of death in *Gemini Wing*.

Coopdevil On a gameplay level I always loved the cleverness of the double ship in *Galaga*. Such a neat mechanism to make you work for the double-firepower and risk messing it all up and losing a life for no benefit.

JetSetWilly Green aiming laser in *Gunstar Heroes*. That plus flame is essential.

aztecca The game itself was pants, but the power-ups in *Altered Beast* were pretty cool.

DISABILITIES

Old Skool 75 We all hear that there are too few women heroes in games. We also hear that there are not many people of different ethnic backgrounds in games. I will say that we do have a certain Lara Croft and miss Jill Valentine, but what about me? Which gaming character represents me? I challenge you all to try to think of characters with disabilities in games. Good luck.

thevulture The end boss in *MGS3*. Confined to a wheelchair, he also suffers from narcolepsy.

Urbanator I'm sure the end boss in *Final Fight* was wheelchair-bound.

necronom Robocop. Disabled and a good guy.

Rabiteman Captain Novolin on the SNES was diabetic and had to avoid sugary snacks lest he slip into a diabetic coma. Play this and you'll slip into a coma as well.

FAVOURITE RETRO MAG

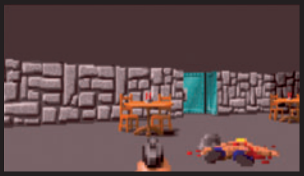
Crusto I know there are loads of candidates so a poll isn't ideal, but what was your favourite read of yesteryear? All in all I loved *C&VG* the most. I don't know why, I suppose it's because I had the most fun reading it. Mean Yob was a real laugh.

C=Style *Sega Saturn* magazine was most definitely my favourite read. It had really good reviews and very knowledgeable writers, plus the mag was gorgeously designed, still love reading it today. I used to love reading *Amiga Power*, and would love to get hold of some old copies. And I guess *Zzap! 64* was the best, but I also liked *C&VG* (and *Mean Machines* LOL) in its early days.

Old VS NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Wolfenstein* is your favourite?

Wolfenstein 3D | **Wolfenstein**





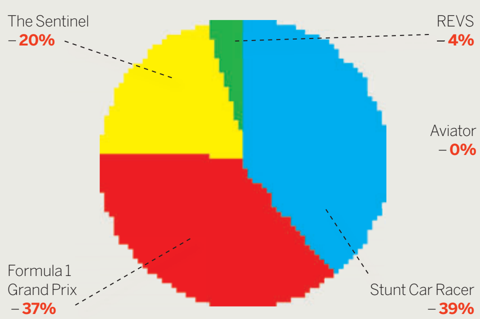
60% | 40%

SpiffierRabbit Old *Wolfie* for me. The speed at which you ran through the corridors was awesome.

Dunjohn The original's lack of camera bob makes me feel like I'm controlling a tub of butter.

HOT TOPIC

Best Geoff Crammond game?



"*F1GP*: what Geoff managed to squeeze out of a lowly 520STFM is beyond me" **– thevulture**

"*The Sentinel*: great to play and with an amazing and eerie atmosphere" **– Mire Mare**

"*F1GP* on Amiga: a big step forwards in race sims at the time – not only in terms of graphics, but also physics and attention to detail" **– Eric**

CONTACT US

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Glad to hear you enjoyed the articles, Barry. We may well re-visit the top 25s very soon. But if we do, don't expect them to be the sprawling eight-page articles that they were in the past.

MOBILE MOAN

Dear Retro Gamer,

I'm gutted that the mobile section no longer appears in the magazine. Apple has been releasing so many games on the system that your section was a great way of working out what to spend my cash on. I also enjoyed the interviews you did as well, as they often gave great insight into the game's creation. I know that you still cover iPhone games in the normal review section, but I'd love to see a proper section again. Can you bring it back please?

Jason McIntyre via email

Sorry, Jason, but we've decided to cut the entire review section down to squeeze in an extra article, so we're unlikely to go back to the two-page round-up of old. We'll still cover the games, of course.

MIND BLOGGING

Hi guys,

I just wanted to say how much I enjoy all the other bits you do on top of producing a damn fine mag. I've been following **Retro Gamer** since issue 50 (the Dreamcast issue) and have remained an avid reader. My favourite features have to be the In The Chair With… interviews and the in-depth History Of… features. However, I do have one minor complaint: I wish you guys would update your blog more frequently. I really enjoy reading the posts while tucking into my lunch at work. I just wish you'd post more often.

David Whiteleaf, Devon

We're trying to make more of an effort to post daily content on the RG blog, but sometimes we find ourselves getting too involved with the production of the magazine and inevitably the blog suffers.



It took Luca 71 days to slay the dragon that was guarding his copy of Retro Gamer, but judging from his face, it was well worth it.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Beatles: Rock Band

The *Daily Mail* printed an article calling *The Beatles: Rock Band* and the band's recent album remasters cynical cash-ins. Darran felt compelled to write a stern letter explaining this isn't the case. He hopes his letter will be printed and seen by Paul McCartney, who will then subscribe to his YouTube channel. Neither Stuart nor Steve are convinced Darran's plan will come to together. But they wish him luck all the same.

Still, you may have noticed that in the last month we've been updating it with new content more than ever, so if you haven't checked it in a while, take a trip to http://blog.retrogamer.net.

NICE RUSTY HELMET

Hello,

I couldn't go on holiday without my **Retro Gamer.** So I decided to send you some pictures of my last visit to a medieval castle in the north of Italy. Enjoy.

Luca Siracusa

Great pics, Luca, and the irony of you holding a copy of Retro Gamer while dressed like a 'very retro police officer' isn't lost on us. Good work.

> "I'm gutted that the mobile section no longer appears in the magazine. Can you bring it back please?"

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

The Beatles: Rock Band

I love *Rock Band 2*, but I'll never need to play it again because *The Beatles: Rock Band* is a music game I love nearly as much as myself. Brilliant music, fantastic presentation and a whole lot of exciting DLC.





STUART

Red Faction: Guerrilla

While the terraformed world looks a little drab and the missions can occasionally feel a bit samey, the gameplay and the awesome Wrecking Crew mode has had me glued to my Xbox for weeks.





ASH

Colour Changing Tingle's Love Balloon Trip

This bizarre point-and-click puts the *Zelda* antihero in a *Wizard Of Oz*-style adventure in which he has to find a girlfriend. Even more weirdly, you have to touch a pig to save the game.

retro GAMER

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JAMES HALEY

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It's-a me, Mario!!!

From NES to Wii: Everything you need to know about Mario's super adventures

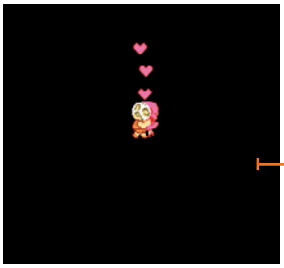
OTHER EXCITING FEATURES

- Discover why SNK's Neo Geo remains one of gaming's most expensive and desirable consoles
- Ben Daglish composed some of the C64's most memorable tunes, but what's he up to now? **Retro Gamer** reveals all
- The creators of the original *Fallout* games explain how the apocalyptic franchise has evolved over the last decade



SPLATTERHOUSE: WANPAKU GRAFFITI

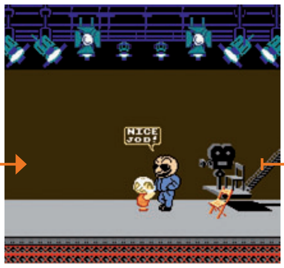
Given the brutality and unflinching gore found in Namco's excellent *Splatterhouse* series, Rick Taylor's debut on the NES underwent a pretty severe lobotomy, basically becoming a Frankenstein of a *Mario* game and a David Zucker movie. Even then, Namco still chickened out big time with a twist ending.



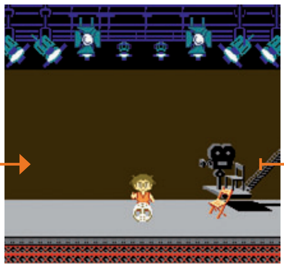
SCREEN 1
Rick defeats the Pumpkin Prince and is reunited with the love of his life. The pair share an embrace and their unity produces some love hearts. Aww…



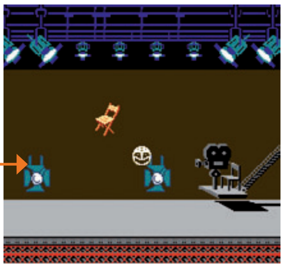
SCREEN 2
The moment is interrupted by someone shouting 'cut!' They're actually on a film set and the whole game has been some spoof horror film! Good grief!



SCREEN 3
The director applauds Rick for his excellent performance. Oscar worthy? Perhaps. Well he did manage to pull the wool over our eyes.



SCREEN 4
With the day's shoot over, Rick removes his mask and makes his way back to his trailer. Judging by his face, he could probably do with some sleep.



SCREEN 5
In typical *Splatterhouse* ending fashion, the mask becomes self-aware, making a nuisance of itself and throwing chairs around in a threatening manner. Jerk.